ESSAY: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

A comparison and contrast theme may be organized in one (1) of two (2) patterns. *Either is acceptable, but mixing patterns is not.* Review the two patterns below carefully, noting the differences in structure that each presents.

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**PATTERN A: THE BLOCK METHOD**

In Pattern A, the writer discusses one unit in its entirety before going on to the other.

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THESIS STATEMENT: The community college offers advantages in cost, convenience, and instructors that are often unknown at the four-year college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Community College</th>
<th>II. Four-year College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Cost</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Convenience</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Instructors</td>
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The danger built into Pattern A is that the writer can end with two separate essays instead of one unified comparison and contrast essay. To insure unity, take note of the following guidelines:

1. Each subtopic in Part I must also be discussed in Part II.
2. Subtopics should be discussed in the same order in both parts.
3. Subtopics in Part II should generally include reminders of the point made about the same subtopic in Part I. **Notice how to make reminders to a previous point:**

   **PART I:** First, community colleges like DeKalb are fairly inexpensive.
   **PART II:** However, unlike community colleges, the fees at such four-year colleges as Alabama are often very high.

   **PART I:** Community colleges are also very convenient.
   **PART II:** Contrasting dramatically to the convenience of a community college, a four-year college presents many inconveniences.

   **PART I:** Instructors at community colleges teach their own class and tend to treat the student like a neighbor.
   **PART II:** Unlike community colleges, the student at a four-year college may be taught by a teaching assistant who is not concerned with developing a rapport with students.

Below is a sample of the body paragraphs using the block method. Pay particular attention to the importance of transitions:
The community college is a good choice because of its cost, convenience and instructors that are often unknown at the four-year college. Community colleges are usually fairly inexpensive. The average quarterly cost is generally about $550: tuition ($370), books ($150), and activity fee ($30). These colleges are usually conveniently located in the student's own community. A student's classes are almost always in the same building, and the parking lot is rarely crowded and is usually within easy walking distance. Not only are most community colleges relatively inexpensive and convenient, they also strive to employ fully qualified instructors. Many faculty members have Ph.D's and publish regularly in their field. Because instructors work at a "Community" College, they also tend to be concerned enough with the student to treat him like a neighbor. Classes are usually smaller than those of a four-year college and instructors are likely to be more readily available for conferences.

The same cannot be said about the four-year college. The cost of attending a four-year college usually far exceeds the relatively inexpensive cost of a community college. The average quarterly expense is about $1100: tuition ($750), books ($300), and activity fee ($50). Contrasting dramatically to the convenience of a community college, a four-year college often requires a student to wait for a bus to drive her across campus to her next class; not being able to find a parking spot within walking distance of a student's class is a common problem. Instead of being able to count on friendly instructors willing to schedule one-on-one conferences, students at a four year college may find themselves in huge lecture halls with hundreds of classmates. These instructors cannot know their students individually or answer questions they may have. Also, students may find themselves in a class taught by a "student" teaching assistant who is as concerned with earning his own degree as educating or developing a rapport with his students.

**PATTERN B: THE POINT-BY-POINT METHOD**

Pattern B can be thought of as a seesaw. It swings back and forth between its two subjects.

**THESIS STATEMENT:** The community college offers advantages in cost, convenience, and instructors that are often unknown at the four-year college.

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Below is a sample of a point-by-point body paragraph:

For one thing, the community college is usually less expensive than the four-year
college. Since most students at a community college live at home, all they have to pay is tuition, which rarely exceed $550 a quarter. The student at a four-year college, on the other hand, often lives on campus and has to pay for tuition and room and board. The cost can be as much as $1100 plus room and board per quarter. Textbooks are also generally more reasonable at the community college. Since the classes offered are more basic and "to the point," the instructor tends not to require any "extra" textbooks. However, the so-called more sophisticated courses taught at a four-year school almost always require an extra paperback or two. A third way that community colleges are less expensive than four-year colleges involves the often exorbitant activity fee. Because there are fewer activities at a community college, the student rarely has to pay more than $30 per quarter, but at a four-year school, complete with a "big-time" football and basketball program, the student rarely pays less than $50 per quarter.

**TO RECAP:**

**Pattern A** tends to work better for short papers and those with few subtopics. Use when you have 3 or more principal differences (same points in the same order; roughly the same length). Present all the information about A, and then present parallel information about B:

First all I: point 1 (plus support)  
Then all II: point 1 (plus support)  
point 2 (plus support)  
point 2 (plus support)  
point 3 (plus support)  
point 3 (plus support)

**Pattern B** tends to work better for long papers and those with many subtopics. Use when you have only two principal differences (same order; roughly the same length). Skip back and forth between A and B. Present one point about A, and then go to the parallel point about B. Then move to the next point and do the same thing:

First A: point 1 (plus support)  
Then B: point 1 (plus support)  
First A: point 2 (plus support)  
Then B: point 2 (plus support)  
First A: point 3 (plus support)  
Then B: point 3 (plus support)

Here are some transitional words for use in:

**CONTRASTING**  
although on the other hand whereas in contrast but while however yet conversely  
**COMPARING**  
in the same way just as ... so and, also, in addition similarly as well as like both, neither too each of the same