Compare/Contrast Essay: PSC Writing Lab Planning Sheet

**Step 1:** Look at your assignment, and find out the answer to the question below. Be sure to check with your instructor if you are unsure. Then, follow the chart below to proceed.

**Do you need to choose your own articles/short stories?**

**No**

**Yes**

Read the assigned articles or short stories carefully. **Focus on identifying similarities and/or differences** between the two. Then, proceed to step 2.

Look at your list of options. **Aim to find two articles or stories that have similar main ideas or themes.**

Look closely! Two articles or stories may seem very different at first, but they may still be making the same point about human nature, good versus evil, or the role people should play in solving some type of universal problem. Then, proceed to step 2.

**Step 2:** Think about similarities and differences between the articles/stories, not just in terms of **WHAT** each author/story/article is saying but also **HOW** the author has chosen to get his or her ideas across to the reader. **To help you stay focused, answer these questions:**

1. What common **themes** or **main ideas** are discussed in both? (Themes are usually life lessons the writer wants the reader, YOU, to learn from the piece.)

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1. Circle the most prominent theme or main idea from your list above. **Which author does a** **better job** of *explaining* it or *showing it off* to the reader? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. **What makes that article or story more effective?** Circle all that apply below, or write your own.

clearer explanation/goal stronger points relatable examples or characters

better facts/sources more detailed easier to follow/more organized

better tone/attitude more realistic/practical better use of symbols to explain theme

Other (list here): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Determine who the **intended audience** of each piece might be.
   1. **In short stories,** the writer’s intended audience is often a **particular region or culture**.
      1. For example, an author might use familiar expressions or a type of language that people from the South might understand, but that same language might be confusing to people from the North. This would be a clue that the author’s intended audience might be Southerners.
      2. On the other hand, a story that seems to be defending or explaining Southern culture might be intended for a Northern audience.
   2. **In articles,** the writer’s intended audience becomes clear when **you look at the assumptions the writer makes** as he or she goes along. Ask yourself what the writer tends to assume the reader will be familiar with, prefer, or even believe when it comes to their particular topic.
      1. Are they writing for people who **agree** or **disagree** with the writer’s opinion on the topic?
      2. Do they assume the reader **knows a lot** about the topic or **does not know much** at all about the topic?
      3. Is the article written primarily for a particular **age group**, such as young adults, or **socioeconomic group**, such as the upper class?

**🡪 Use the information above. Who is each author writing for?**

Author #1 is writing for a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_audience.

Author #2 is writing for a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_audience.

1. Determine what **types of** **evidence** each author uses to support his or her theme or main idea.
   1. **For short stories,** begin by reminding yourself of the story’s main theme—the moral or life lesson that you feel the story is trying to teach the reader.
      1. **EXAMPLE:** If the life lesson in both stories is that **you should never tell a lie**, perhaps in one story we learn this from the main character’s mistake. In another story, maybe we learn this from details about the setting—such as a house that has been accidentally burned to the ground. Both the main character who made a mistake and the destroyed house would be your evidence.
   2. **For articles,** look directly at the facts, statistics, and quotes from experts that appear in each article. Also pay attention to hypothetical examples or personal anecdotes/stories that may be included.

Story/Article 2 types of evidence:

Story/Article 1 types of evidence:

**-or-**

**Step 3:** Use the Point-by-Point Method.

**Introduction:** Mention the **titles** of both articles/stories and the full names of both **authors**. State **when** the articles/stories were written and **where** they were published (if applicable).

* What similar **topic or theme** do the two articles or stories discuss?
* What makes this similarity **interesting** or **timely**?
* Provide your **thesis statement**. (Don’t worry—we’ll build that in Step 4!)

**Body Paragraph 1 –Effectiveness**

* **Does one article/story do a better job** of portraying its main idea/theme (life lesson) than the other? Use quotes and explain your choice.
* **Do they differ on a specific point?** Is there an idea that is mentioned in one article that is not discussed much (or at all) in the other? Is this a good or bad thing? Explain your answer.
* **Is there anything missing?** Describe information, characters, etc. that could be added to one or both articles/stories to enhance or clarify a point.

**Body Paragraph 2 –Evidence/Support**

* Does one article/story use **better (or more) evidence** than the other?
  + If **yes**, what’s the difference? Why it is important?
  + If **no**, point out any *meaningful* similarities or differences. Explain why they are important.

**Body Paragraph 3 – Audience**

* Do the articles/stories seem to be written for a **similar audience or 2 different ones**? Use quotes and explain your answer.
* Does one author do a **better job of responding to the intended audience** than the other? Why is this difference important? Explain your answer.

**Conclusion**

* Re-state **thesis** (in different words)
* Summarize the main **similarities** and **differences**
* Remind the reader why the topic and/or comparison is **important.**

**Step 3:** Use the Block Method.

**Introduction:** Mention the **titles** of both articles/stories and the full names of both **authors**. State **when** the articles/stories were written and **where** they were published (if applicable).

* What similar **topic or theme** do the two articles or stories discuss?
* What makes this similarity **interesting** or **timely**?
* Provide your **thesis statement**. (Don’t worry—we’ll build that in Step 4!)

**Body Paragraph 1 – Article/Story 1**

* **Effectiveness:** What does this author do well? Has the author overlooked any important points or ideas? Are there enough details to help you understand the theme (life lesson)?
* **Evidence/Support:** How credible is the evidence or support that this article uses to defend its life lesson (theme) or main idea? Is the evidence recent and reliable? Do the characters seem believable?
* **Audience:** Who is this article written for? Does the author respond appropriately to this audience? What do you think of the writer’s tone?

**Body Paragraph 2 – Article/Story 2**

* **Effectiveness:** What does this author do well? Has the author overlooked any important points or ideas? Are there enough details to help you understand the theme (life lesson)?
* **Evidence/Support:** How credible is the evidence or support that this article uses to defend its life lesson (theme) or main idea? Is the evidence recent, or is the author relying on older, less useful data? Do the characters in the story seem believable?
* **Audience:** Who is this article written for? Does the author respond appropriately to this audience? What do you think of the writer’s tone?

**Conclusion**

* Re-state **thesis** (in different words)
* Summarize the main **similarities** between the two articles/stories
* Summarize the main **differences** between the 2 stories/articles
* Remind the reader why the topic/comparison is **important**.

**Step 4:** Build a thesis statement. Begin by reading this template:

**While both**  [Author 1] **and** [Author 2] **discuss**  [main idea or theme] **in terms of** [choose another main similarity]**, their** [articles or stories] **differ when it comes to** [main difference 1], [main difference 2]**, and** [optional main difference 3].

**Fill in the blanks below to create your own working thesis statement.** Make choices based on the information you already wrote down on the previous pages.

While both\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ discuss \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_in terms of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, their articles/stories differ when it comes to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

* **Sample thesis (article):** While both Smith and Jones discuss the negative effect that sugary foods have on weight gain, their articles differ when it comes the amount of helpful advice they provide, the reliability of their evidence, and the type of audiences they are trying to reach.
  + **Simplified version:** While Smith and Jones agree that sugary foods cause weight gain, their articles are geared toward different types of dieters.

* **Sample thesis (short stories):** While both Faulkner and O’Connor presented the darker side of Southern culture in their stories, they differed in terms of the types of imagery they used, the types of characters that tell their stories, and the role they expected the reader to play as each story unfolds.
  + **Simplified version:** While Faulkner and O’Connor both wrote about the darker side of Southern culture, they were motivated by different aspects of its hypocrisy.