**AP LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
ORGANIZE COMPARE/CONTRAST ESSAY**

You will be writing a book review that compares and contrasts the two books you read for the research paper. This review is short. It will be about **500 words** (which translates to about two double-spaced pages).

# Evaluation

How do you evaluate a book for a book review? I’m sure you have written a bunch of “book reports” but how about a “book review”? I’m not talking about the “arrived on time, like-new condition, no marks on the pages, thanks!” or “this book totally did not help me pass my AP Language class” on Amazon.com or iTunes. I mean a scholarly, academic book review.

First, you need to **critically analyze the contents without bias**. Ask yourself these questions to get to the root of a critical analysis:

* Has the purpose of the book been achieved?
* What contribution does the book make to the field?
* Is the treatment of the subject matter objective?
* Are there facts and evidence that have been omitted?
* What kinds of data, if any, are used to support the author's thesis statement?
* Can the same data be interpreted to alternate ends?
* Is the writing style clear and effective?
* Does the book raise important or provocative issues or topics for discussion and further research?
* What has been left out?

Support your evaluation with evidence from each text and, when possible, in relation to other sources. If relevant, make note of each book's format, such as, layout, binding, typography, etc. Are there maps, illustrations? Do they aid in understanding the research problem? This is particular important in books that contain a lot of non-textual elements, such as tables, charts, and illustrations.

**NOTE: It is important to carefully distinguish your views from those of the authors, so that you don’t confuse your reader.**

**Essential content is not the only thing to consider when writing a book review. The front and back matter (or lack thereof) may be crucial to your review. It may also just be something to consider, depending on space. And with only 500 words, unless it is worth remarking, you should probably leave it out.**

**The following back matter may be included in a book and should be considered for evaluation when reviewing the overall quality of the book:**

* **Table of contents**--is it clear? Does it reflect the true contents of the book?
* **Author biography**--also found as back matter, the biography of author(s) can be useful in determining the authority of the writer and whether the book builds on prior research or represents new research. In scholarly reviews, noting the author's affiliation can be a factor in helping the reader determine the overall validity of work [i.e., are they associated with a research center devoted to studying the research problem under investigation].
* **Foreword**--in scholarly books, a foreword may be written by the author or an expert on the subject of the book. The purpose of a foreword is to introduce the reader to the author as well as the book itself, and attempt to establish credibility for both. A foreword does not contribute any additional information about the book's subject matter, but it serves as a means of validating the book's existence. Later editions of a book sometimes have a new foreword prepended [appearing before an older foreword if there was one], which might explain in what respects that edition differs from previous ones.
* **Preface**--generally describes the genesis, purpose, limitations, and scope of the book and may include acknowledgments of indebtedness to people who have helped the author complete the study. Is the preface helpful in understanding the study? Does it effectively provide a framework for what's to follow?
* **Chronology**--also found as back matter, a chronology is generally included to highlight key events related to the subject of the book. Does it contribute to the overall work? Is it detailed or very general?
* **List of non-textual elements**--if a book contains a lot of charts, photographs, maps, etc., they will often be listed in the front.

**The following back matter may be included in a book and should be considered for evaluation when reviewing the overall quality of the book:**

* **Afterword**--this is a short, reflective piece written by the author that takes the form of a concluding section, final commentary, or closing statement. It is worth mentioning in a review if it contributes information about the purpose of the book, gives a call to action, or asks the reader to consider key points made in the book.
* **Appendix**--is the supplementary material in the appendix or appendices well organized? Do they relate to the contents or appear superfluous? Does it contain any essential information that would have been more appropriately integrated into the text?
* **Index**--is the index thorough and accurate? Are there elements such as bold text, to help identify specific parts of the book?
* **Glossary**--are the definitions clearly written? Is the glossary comprehensive or are key terms missing?
* **Endnotes/Footnotes**--check any end notes or footnotes as you read from chapter to chapter. Do they provide important additional information? Do they clarify or extend points made in the body of the text?
* **Bibliography/Further Readings**--review any bibliography or further readings the author may have included. What kinds of sources [e.g., primary or secondary, recent or old, scholarly or popular, etc.] appear in the bibliography? How does the author make use of them? Make note of important omissions.

Beyond the content of the book, **you may also consider some information about the author and the circumstances of the text's production:**

* Who is the author? Nationality, political persuasion, training, intellectual interests, personal history, and historical context may provide crucial details about how a work takes shape. Does it matter, for example, that the author is affiliated with a particular organization? What difference would it make if the author participated in the events he or she writes about? What other topics has the author written about? Does this work build on prior research or does it seem to represent a new area of research?
* What is the book's genre? Out of what discipline does it emerge? Does it conform to or depart from the conventions of its genre? These questions can provide a historical or other contextual standard upon which to base your evaluations. If you are reviewing the first book ever written on the subject, it will be important for your readers to know this. Keep in mind, though, that declarative statements about being the “first,” the "best," or the "only" book of its kind can be a risky unless you're absolutely certain because your professor [presumably] has a much better understanding of the overall research literature.

# Thesis

The thesis statement of an essay that compares and contrasts multiple works should **contain an idea or claim that unites a discussion of the texts under review**. It must be succinct, accurate, unbiased, and clear.

To begin, ask yourself: "What is the overarching subject or issue that ties together all of the books?" Why is it important?"

**If you find it difficult to discern the overall aims and objectives of the book** [and, be sure to point this out in your review if you believe it to be a deficiency], you may arrive at an understanding of the purpose by asking yourself the following questions:

* Why did the author write on this subject rather than on some other subject?
* From what point of view is the work written?
* Was the author trying to give information, to explain something technical, or to convince the reader of a belief’s validity by dramatizing it in action?
* What is the general field or genre, and how does the book fit into it? Review related literature from other books and journal articles to familiarize yourself with the field, if necessary.
* Who is the intended audience?
* What is the author's style? Is it formal or informal? You can evaluate the quality of the writing style by noting some of the following standards: coherence, clarity, originality, forcefulness, correct use of technical words, conciseness, fullness of development, and fluidity.
* Scan the Table of Contents because it can help you understand how the book is organized and will aid in determining the author's main ideas and how they are developed [e.g., chronologically, topically, etc.]
* How did the book affect you? Were any prior assumptions you had on the subject changed, abandoned, or reinforced due to this book? How is the book related to your own course or personal agenda? What personal experiences have you had that relate to the subject?
* How well has the book achieved its goal(s)?
* Would you recommend this book to others? Why or why not?

**NOTE**: **Be sure that your thesis statement includes the rationale behind why your choices of what points to compare and contrast were deliberate and meaningful and not random!**

# Organization

Okay—you’ve considered all the questions. Now how do you organize all the thoughts jumping around in your head? There are two ways to organize a multiple book review. There is the *book by book* or the *point by point* methods. The choice is best determined by your thesis or argument. Don’t forget—evidence of your claims! (Cite, cite, cite! That includes quotations, page numbers and a Works Cited list!)

**The Book by Book Method**
Present all the information about A, and then present parallel information about B. This pattern tends to work better for shorter book review essays, and those with few sub-topics.

I. Introduction
    A. Briefly introduce the significance of the overall subject matter
        --First supporting point
        --Second supporting point
        --Third supporting point
 B. Thesis Statement

II. First book
    A. Summary of book
        --Relationship of work to first point
        --Relationship of work to second point
        --Relationship of work to third point

III. Second book
    A. Summary of book
        --Relationship of work to first point
        --Relationship of work to second point
        --Relationship of work to third point

V. Conclusion
    A. Restate thesis
    B. Summarize how you proved your argument

**The Point-by-Point Method**
Present one point about A, and then go to the parallel point about B. Move to the next point, and do the same thing. This pattern tends to work better for long book review essays and those with many sub-topics.

I. Introduction
    A. Briefly introduce significance of overall subject matter
    B. Thesis statement

II. Brief explanation of first book

III. Brief explanation of second book

IV. First comparative point
    A. Relation of point to first book
    B. Relation of point to second book

V. Second comparative point
    A. Relation of point to first book
    B. Relation of point to second book

VII. Conclusion
    A. Restate thesis
    B. Summarize how your proved your argument