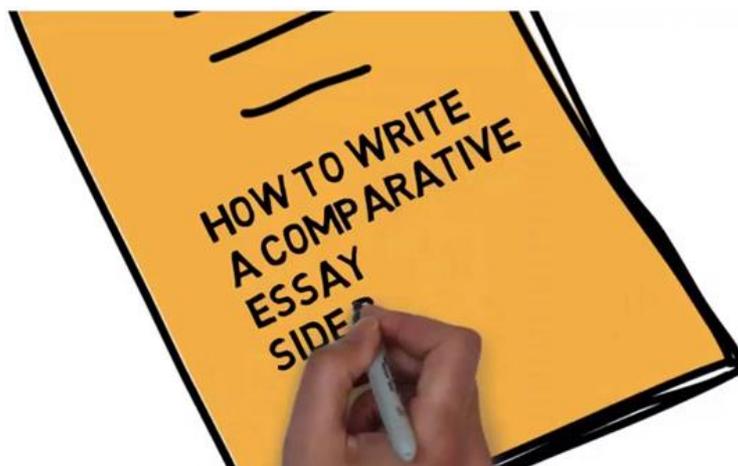


COMPARATIVE WRITING: ASSESSMENTS



It would be difficult to find a piece of literature or other form of media that exists on its own. The ideas it would present, the way they were portrayed, and its reasons for doing so would need to have no point of comparison with any other text yet created. I doubt that such a text could ever be found so the question that remains is “Given all forms of media have common or at least comparable themes and messages, what is there to be gained from analysing these similarities and differences?”

You may not care about the reason for why you complete these assessments, in which case please skip ahead to where I begin discussing how to strengthen your comparative writing skills. However, for those who are concerned with matters of purpose, take a moment to consider how opinions are formed. Very few people determine their beliefs about a topic without input from either past experience or advice, but very many people will retain these expectations based on a limited understanding. For example, someone might read in a popular magazine that carbohydrates are an important part of a healthy diet. Unless this person expands their knowledge by researching which types of carbohydrates are healthy and what else forms a nutritious diet, he or she may decide that this means they do not need to eat vegetables and can instead indulge in choc-chip muffins every meal. This example may seem ridiculous, but it should highlight the significance of knowing how to extract information from a text and examine it in relation to other sources to gain a deeper comprehension of the original message and the overall topic.

To begin developing these critical thinking skills early in life is an invaluable skill that will protect you from naïvely grounding your worldview on one perspective. Although the comparative writing assessment is not asking for your opinion on the ideas presented in the two texts, it is your task to examine how two texts can interrelate in their discussion of themes and how this corresponds to the creators’ agendas. The reason you invest into this comparative analysis is to thus equip yourself with the clarity to evaluate your own beliefs and ways of thinking being modelled to you.

In order to strengthen one’s comparative writing skills, it is certainly beneficial to understand the purpose behind the task. However, there are also practical tips that can boost the quality of your essays and these will be explored in the resource.

BE CLEAR ABOUT IDEAS



If you read the study design for this outcome, the key knowledge plainly and repeatedly states that students need to understand the ideas, issues and themes presented in texts; in both Unit 2 and Unit 4, there are four mentions of this phrase in the key knowledge section. As such, there is a need to be capable of distinctly demonstrating that these aspects have been addressed in your writing. But, first of all, what even are they? And, perhaps more importantly, how does one identify them?

The following definitions of these three words have been sourced from the Australian Oxford Dictionary.

- **Idea:**

A plan formed by mental effort; mental impression or concept; intention or purpose; archetype or pattern; ambition or inspiration.

- **Issue:**

Important subject of debate or litigation; point in question.

- **Theme:**

Subject or topic of a talk, book, etcetera; (in music) the prominent melody in a composition.

One of the ways that we can identify the issue presented in a text is explore the context in which it is written. If you consider *Pride and Prejudice*, it is evident that the contemporary social norms surrounding love and its significance in marriage have informed Jane Austen's writing; one of the issues in question here is whether one should adhere to custom and marry sensibly, ignore protocol and love recklessly, or find the middle ground, if that is even possible. If you then compare this to any modern romantic comedy films, the difference in context often changes the problem being highlighted. On the other hand, novels written in the era of World War II can deal with strikingly similar concerns to texts being written today, such as how to retain one's integrity during times of great hardship.

EXERCISE #1:

Research the contexts of the two texts you will be comparing.

- What were challenges faced by the creator or the community?
- What similarity in events can be found from the text background to the plot? Where do the differences lie? This will help reveal the creator's ideas or views on the issue.
- Who or what might the creator have been addressing in this work?

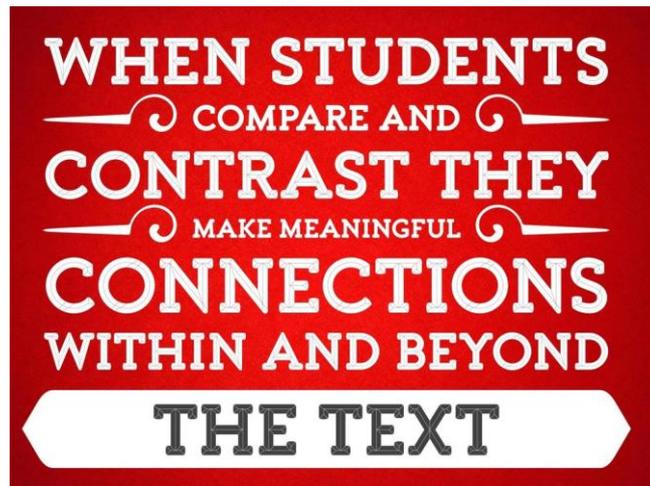
If you can recognise the issues at stake for the creator of each text, the next logical step is to uncover their ideas or views on these contentious topics. Often, the word "ideas" can seem to be such a broad term that it is hard to understand what it might be referring to in the context of VCE English. However, one way of unpacking this aspect of writing is to examine how the creator is positioning the reader or viewer to understand the issue.

Let's consider the novel *Never Let Me Go*, which is part of one of the 2020 VCE English comparison text pairs. Though it is not the primary concern of the text, the author Kazuo Ishiguro discusses the ethics of cloning in the narrative and from this, one of the ideas he explores is the potential for individuality in a duplicate. Readers are introduced to the fictitious world through the perspective of one of the clones Kathy and through her narration it becomes apparent that despite her artificial beginnings, she can still experience and express emotion. Some of the themes that thus emerge from this context are the inherent value of human life, conflict between conformity and free will, and the power of memory.

Now, having examined how we might identify these essential aspects of a text, it is vital that we also write about them well. Here are some suggestions for how to do that.

- Indicate key ideas that will be forming the focus of your essay in your introduction. Note that the study design is asking you as a student to demonstrate your knowledge of how these ideas, issues and themes are conveyed in texts. Although in the former examples only one text was explored in detail, the introduction should present how both creators respond to the relevant issue or issues. A simple method of achieving this is starting your sentence with "The two authors highlight..." and substituting the appropriate terminology for your text pair.
- Begin each body paragraph with a topic sentence that showcases the idea. Remember that the first sentence of a paragraph will always signal its focus. If you do not start with a statement about which idea you will be discussing in relation to the texts, then there is a risk that the reader will find it difficult to identify it. If in doubt, ask the advice of someone who has read your writing about whether you are clearly stating ideas.
- Invest time into developing language that articulates each creator's attitude toward the issue. You can prepare for the essay by brainstorming ideas related to this text pair's issues then re-writing each idea in concise, analytical language. Avoid rambling!

BE EFFICIENT IN STUDY



One of the most daunting aspects of the comparative writing assessment can be that it involves analysing two texts. If writing an essay based solely on the work of one author or director was difficult enough, then the prospect of replicating the same degree of excellence can seem overwhelming when another text is involved. However, there are options for resolving this dilemma without resigning oneself to never sleeping again.

Once the foundations of your knowledge have been laid in regard to each text's ideas, issues and themes (this is another reminder that a thorough understanding of these elements is essential), developing a meaningful set of notes is not only advantageous but even achievable. These notes should form a useful reminder of the examples and analysis that will become the body of your essays and, ideally, will help establish strong connections in your mind so that you do not spend an hour looking at a blank page when it comes to writing the essay.

How does this look?

One method is outlined in the next exercise.

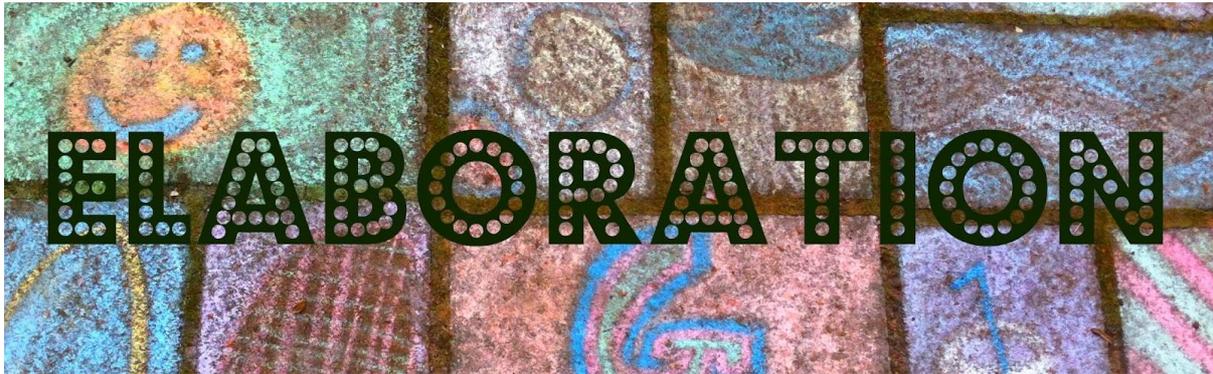
EXERCISE #2:

Choose one idea that is explored in the text pair you are studying and fill in the following table.

IDEA	
TEXT 1	TEXT 2
Example:	Example:
Analysis:	Analysis:
Example:	Example:
Analysis:	Analysis:
Example:	Example:
Analysis:	Analysis:

Completing this table for every idea allows you to link examples together so that you can note the points of comparison. It also identifies which examples are not likely to be used in any essay. If you are struggling to know which aspects of your texts are the most deserving of your attention, then spending time in an activity that highlights which connect with the key ideas will reveal where you should direct your attention.

BE INNOVATIVE WITH ELABORATION



In continuation from the need to maximise the output of your study, it is worth returning to the original statement that “one of the most daunting aspects of the comparative writing assessment can be that it involves analysing two texts.” Now, though some students may react by studying incessantly, others may resort to only using obvious or common examples from the texts. This results in assessors reading a lot of essays that all share the same evidence. Of course, there are only so many aspects of a text that relate to a given theme or topic and possessing the writing skills to analyse these examples well is still a fundamental component of this assessment, but the question remains: Do you want your writing to appear fresh and original?

You cannot control what others will include in their essays (although you can assume that any information published online in a free study guide will be used by most students), but you can choose to deepen your understanding of the texts. You can choose to incorporate analysis of minor characters and less prominent events. You can choose to develop your own interpretation of the texts. There is a lot of choice available here and most often that is what prevents students from taking advantage of it.

How do you develop a bank of examples and analysis that will not seem average? Realistically, the first time that you read a text and write about it will reveal only a superficial understanding. When you are then encouraged to write about the abstract concepts of ideas, issues, and themes for two texts, it is even more likely that your writing will become vague or generic. That is okay. That is the reason why there is a process involved in preparing for an essay, rather than merely writing it once and never looking back.

When you review your initial practise pieces, it is worth noting:

- Where am I repeating myself? Are the ideas for each paragraph too similar?
- Have I only talked about main characters?
- Have I analysed examples from the most accepted perspective? (Does everyone discuss these events in the same way?)

In the meantime, here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Similarly: likewise; correspondingly; analogously; in the same way; equivalently.
- In contrast: the opposite; in contradiction; conversely; however; in juxtaposition; unlike.

These are possible sentence structures for comparative analysis:

- While the author highlights..., the director demonstrates...
- Although the author asserts... the director infers...
- The author suggests... whereas the director criticises...
- Varying from the author's portrayal of..., the director emphasises...
- The director extends upon the author's discussion of... by...
- The author mirrors the director's intent by...
- The author's critique of... is reiterated in the director's exposition of...
- The commendatory representation of... in the novel is echoed in the film's depiction of...
- The downfall of the novel's protagonist is paralleled in the film as...

This resource was prepared by Rachel Bell on behalf of TSFX, 2020.