

Bases of Comparison

Note: remember that “compare” always means “compare AND contrast”

Basis of Comparison: a category that helps you to organize and focus your analysis by identifying significant points, qualities, structures, concerns that either unify or differentiate your two texts.

- “similarities” and “differences”

Step One: Knowing your texts

- make sure that you have a good grasp of each of the texts you have chosen
- ARTICULATE clearly
 - key concepts and concerns
 - important plot points
 - important or recurring images, metaphors etc.
- PROVIDE examples

Step Two: Brainstorming in Parallel

- using two parallel columns, write out all that you know about each text;
- if you ask a **question** about one text, make sure that you ask **same question** of the other text;
- begin to “brainstorm” by noting any ideas, language, concerns, images, attitudes that are repeated in both columns;
- go back to see if there are **significant points of departure**, places where the texts diverge in ideas, language etc. etc.

- **ASK WHY**
 - Why are the texts the same in this regard? Is it because they share a similar worldview or agenda? Similar techniques or form? Similar theme or concerns? Etc.
 - Why are the texts different in this regard? Is it because they use **different techniques to communicate the same idea**? Why? What do these techniques offer that others don't? Is it because they use the **same techniques to argue different sides of a question**? What about these techniques makes them amenable to such use? Etc.

- REMEMBER that a point of **comparison** may also include a contrast:
 - EG. Both texts address the idea of order and disorder (*comparison*), BUT one text does so in a very regular rhyme and stanzaic structure and the other uses free verse and a lot of strange typography (*contrast*).
 - ASK: **What is the relationship between** the poems' attitudes toward order and disorder and the formal strategies they use to talk about them?

Step Three: Synthesis and Organization

- see if you can group these repetitions into categories to make some *preliminary* bases of comparison.

EG

- rhythm and stanza structure;
- Images of water and fire;
- Passion
- Tone
- Titles

Step Four: Finding Bases that are Valid and Significant

- begin to organize your material in MATCHING CATEGORIES
- Make sure that your categories are VALID:
 - IE. You will not want to say: Raj is **tall** and Mina has **red hair**.
 - **Tallness** and **hair colour** do not make a valid BASIS for comparison
- every question you ask of one text you should ask of the other in order to establish MATCHING CATEGORIES or VALID BASES OF COMPARISON

EG.

POEM A

Q: What is the function of rhythm and rhyme?

Q: What is the attitude of the speaker toward disorder?

Q: How does the idea of passion relate to the idea of orderly communication? Does the tone of the poem encourage passion?

POEM B

Q: What is the function of rhythm and rhyme?

Q: What is the attitude of the speaker toward disorder?

Q: How does the idea of passion relate to the idea of orderly communication? Does the tone of the poem encourage passion?

Good matching categories help you to make sense of the two texts and of their PRIMARY CONCERNS

These will become your BASES OF COMPARISON.

EG.

- RHYTHM AND RHYME: In both poems, the rhythm and rhyme illustrate a particular attitude toward disorder.

- Poem A: Disorder is dangerous (rhythm and rhyme organize it).
 - Example from the poem
- Poem B: Disorder is creative (rhythm and rhyme are restrictive and must be broken).
 - Example from the poem
- TONE: In both poems, the tone is detached and clinical.
 - Poem A: This detachment increases the feeling that there is an external force acting on the world.
 - Example from the poem.
 - Poem B: This detachment is at odds with the free verse, suggesting that there are forces competing in the poem.
 - Example from the poem.
- PASSION: In both poems, passion is powerful.
 - Poem A: This power must be contained so that ideas can be communicated in an orderly way.
 - Example from the poem.
 - Poem B: This power must be free from restraint or else communication becomes stagnant and conventional.
 - Example from the poem.

As you can see, the above list of Bases of Comparison is beginning to look a little bit like an outline for an essay.

Establishing VALID and SIGNIFICANT BASES OF COMPARISON is an essential step in writing your essay.