Writing the Comparison-Contrast Paragraph

Introduction:

The comparison-contrast technique is not only a writing design, but also a system of logic utilized in routine living activities. The shopper looking for a television set compares (looks for similarities) and contrasts (looks for differences) in one TV and another. If he or she is to make the most intelligent choice possible, and be reasonably certain he or she is getting his or her money’s worth, comparison shopping is inescapable. Writers who want to persuade or explain also use the comparison-contrast technique.

Explanation:

The first comparison-contrast paragraph technique to consider is one that produces a “ping-pong” effect. In this style, the writer first states (in the topic sentence) the purpose for writing the paragraph. Then he or she writes one sentence exemplifying one of the items and another sentence exemplifying the other item. The back and forth treatment of ideas gives readers the impression that the writer has given the subject a fair treatment.

Example:

For example, let us say that you wanted to prove that country life is superior to city life. Two “ping-pong” effect outlines on the topic and the example paragraph that follows:

Topic: Country Life is Superior to City Life

Example Outline:

1. People
   A. Country
   B. City
2. Lot size
   A. Country
   B. City
3. Air pollution
   A. Country
   B. City
4. Physical, emotional health
   A. Country
   B. City

5. Friendships
   A. Country
   B. City

Example paragraph:
In the following paragraph the comparison and contrast is made in alternating sentences.

A small country town comes the closest to providing me with what I think of as “the good life”. A country town has fewer people; therefore, they live on big lots with plenty of space. Cities have large clusters of people, living on small lots very close to each other. The air in the country is clean. On the other hand, city air had measurable amount of pollution, and many lung and throat diseases are undoubtedly attributable to industrial city atmospheres. People move slower in the country; they are not troubled constantly by emotional disorders such as anxiety attacks. In the city, however, movement is constant, fast paced, and sometimes reckless. Friendships come easier in the country; people are willing to stand around and chat. They take time with each other. City friendships are brief and short-lived as an encounter with an overworked sales clerk.

Exercises:
1. Write a paragraph using the comparison-contrast technique on any of the following topics:
   a. Two cars
   b. Two movies
   c. Two types of music
   d. Two sports
   e. Two houses