How to Write a Comparative Essay
Thesis

The following are some crucial points in writing a clear and analytic thesis for comparative essay.

Example Question:

Compare and Contrast the basic features of TWO of the following religious systems prior to 600 CE		
Polytheism	**Judaism**	**Christianity**

Things to Remember

1) Note the key words in this essay prompt: **compare** and **contrast**. This means you must write a thesis that expresses what Judaism and Christianity had in common and where they were different. In short, your thesis *must* address the comparison.

2) Your thesis (and essay) should stay within the parameters of the question or prompt. An essay on the Columbian exchange should not deal with the Swahili Coast of Africa .

3) Next, your thesis should state an opinion. Be bold. Do not merely restate the question or one of its assumptions. To argue a point, you must first of all *have* one. The following is not an acceptable thesis; it simply restates information given by the prompt:

Judaism and Christianity were similar and different.

4) Your thesis should contain the categories that you will use in the essay as evidence. Do not do this:

Bad *Judaism and Christianity were similar in some ways but different in others.*

The above sentence is vague, wimpy, and is really just a restatement of an assumption in the prompt. It is a fluttering of loose ends needing to be nailed down onto concrete categories. Now look at this one.

Better *Judaism and Christianity were similar in origin but different in practice.*

This thesis is getting there. It at least declares in general categories how the paths of Christianity and Judaism diverged. It has broken down (analyzed) these things into categories that lend themselves to a well defined essay. But it could be better. Note the difference between the above thesis and the one below:

Best *While both Judaism and Christianity are Abrahamic religions sprung from the same cultural hearth, they have diverged in their practices of the faith, recognition of religious cannon, and the divinity of Jesus Christ.*

Think about this thesis for a moment. It directly addresses the comparison (tells what they have in common and where they were different.) It contains the categories (political and cultural) on which the writer will hang relevant historical facts, and the terms (foreign influence and isolationism) on which the comparisons will be made. These categories will form the paragraphs of the essay. This thesis is a verbal engine sufficient to drive the type of essays that could generate an 8 or a 9 on your APWH test, providing you accomplish the other thesis requirements. Try it sometime. In fact, try it now.

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