

## **Comparative Essay Structure**

- I. Introduction
  - a. Broad statement of topic and/or "lead"
    - i. Question, imagery, powerful statement, "big to little", etc.
    - ii. Background information on topic
    - iii. Statement of thesis
      1. must address prompt
      2. strong, defensible stand and/or position
      3. use of analytical categories to preview argument structure
      4. inclusion of sims and diffs (in comparative analysis)
      5. Split thesis is perfectly acceptable if not encouraged
- II. Body Paragraph/Section 1
  - a. Broad, comparative topic sentence to introduce focus of this paragraph only.
    - i. Comparative choice 1
      1. context
      2. concrete detail
      3. commentary/analysis
      4. comparative transition
        - a. use transition words/phrases to make a comparative "bridge" between the two topics and set up analysis
          - i. on the other hand, similarly, likewise, etc.
    - ii. Comparative choice 2 (depending on depth/length of argument, possibly a new paragraph to this section)
      1. context
      2. concrete detail
      3. commentary/analysis
    - iii. Cincher statement
      1. Tie evidence and topic of this paragraph back to thesis statement
- III. Conclusion
  - a. Restatement of thesis
  - b. Summary of main points
  - c. "Stinger"
    - i. Come "full circle" in the essay
      1. depends on type of lead/intro you've created
    - ii. Draw conclusions based on your findings
      1. Is this related to larger issues in society or the world as a whole?
      2. Are there current events or topics that are linked to this and provide context for the larger relevance of your research?
      3. So what? Why does this matter? Why will people care about this in 40 years?

### RESEARCH QUESTION/FOCUS/PROMPT:

*Why does life expectancy vary so greatly around the world? What are the main factors that determine life expectancy in a given country?*

- *How are their leaders chosen?*
- *Do citizens enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of mobility, and of religion? Do they have the right to life, liberty, and ownership of private property?*
- *To what extent does the government control and regulate the economy?*
- *Is the primacy of rule of law acknowledged?*

INTRODUCTION EXAMPLE:

Life expectancy rates across the world vary greatly, from high in the industrialized countries of the world to low in third world countries. The United States, with probably the highest standard of living in the world, has a relatively high life expectancy, as one would probably expect, but not the highest when compared to other industrialized nations. Reasons for such variances are widespread, but some of the most obvious ones would be access to quality healthcare, poverty, and environmental factors such as pollution of water, air, and food supplies. While these are clearly factors that affect life expectancy trends, the reasons behind them aren't as clear cut. In fact, non-traditional factors rarely considered when measuring life expectancy, such as political process, governmental control of economy, and access to basic rights and freedoms, seemingly play a role in life expectancy. Two countries illustrating this finding are the United States and China. While they both represent economic powerhouses on the global scene, there are clearly more differences in political process and control of citizens between these two countries, which ultimately affects and possibly helps to account for the different life expectancies of each.

**Comment:** The author moves from a broad, general statement of topic on a global level to a specific one focusing on the United States. This is an example of the "big to little" intro style: *from the world to the United States.*

**Comment:** Specific background information on topic is given, framing the purpose of the paper and providing context for the argument to be made.

**Comment:** The final two sentences represent a split thesis statement. The author addresses the prompt, take a defensible stand based on sims. and diffs., focusing it categorically on political process and control of citizens, giving the reader a sense of the analytical framework to be used in the body.

BODY PARAGRAPH/SECTION EXAMPLE:

Whether or not a person has the political right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness undoubtedly plays a role in shaping that person's mental well being. More than likely, depending on the society, it could also impact their physical health and general well being, including their overall life expectancy. In the United States, access to these freedoms is guaranteed through the Bill of Rights in the Constitution. This foundational document's first ten amendments to the Constitution represent the founders' desire to protect basic freedoms in America, most notably the freedom of speech, worship, press, and assembly. The equal application of these has perhaps been a little haphazard, but the basic concept of these liberties permeates the fabric of American society. It is difficult to establish whether the mere existence of these liberties correlates to life expectancy, but the basic protection offered by them, especially when contrasted against a society in which these are not the status quo, is difficult to deny.

**Comment:** In more complex writing tasks, it's helpful to think of sections rather than body paragraphs. While this section could probably be jammed into one paragraph, breaking it after the US discussion gives the reader a "break" and helps the flow of the paper.

**Comment:** Topic sentence(s) gives a focus to the section (the right of citizens to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) as it relates to the thesis and the prompt dealing with life expectancy.

**Comment:** Context (Cx) is given to set up the use of Concrete Detail (Cd). The Cd here is the Bill of Rights and its guarantee of certain liberties. Without knowing the specific details/evidence you plan to use, providing context is impossible.

China's record on ensuring basic rights for its citizen in recent years, on the other hand, is quite different than what was experienced in the United States. With the installation of a communist government in the mid twentieth century, China has attempted to provide all needs for its people using a communist philosophy. Basic services were certainly supplied to all, including health care and employment, but the lack of choice and distribution of these in the context of a totalitarian society made it difficult if not impossible for many. The best

**Comment:** Commentary (Cm) should be the longest portion of your paragraph. This is where you comment on the significance of the concrete details (Cd) and evidence you offer in support of your thesis.

**Comment:** The author splits the paragraph. Notice the use of the transition word/phrase "on the other hand" that sets up the comparison.

**Comment:** Context (Cx) of China's history as a communist country is given to set up how individual rights are accessed in this country.

example of liberties being denied was Chairman Mao's disastrous collectivization policy known as *The Great Leap Forward*. Forced out of jobs and into factories, millions starved due to disastrous planning and implementation of policies meant to quickly modernize China. Mao's *Cultural Revolution* in the following decade represented an absolute loss of freedom if not life for many in China, particularly intellectuals and those thought to be associated with the West. Though China tried on many reforms in the 1980s, its crackdown on democracy protesters in 1989 in Tiananmen Square, suggests that the government is still heavily invested in controlling access to basic rights that are common place in America. China's life expectancy has gone up considerably in the last 50 years, but it still lags behind that of the United State's. Despite years' worth of totalitarian rule in China, and despite America's record and reputation for ensuring life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the life expectancy differs by a margin of only six years. With regard to political systems and life expectancy, there may be a correlation between the two government's systems and policies, but the margin between the two is clearly not as wide as one would expect.

**Comment:** Concrete detail (Cd) is offered: The Great Leap Forward. The Cultural Revolution is another Cd.

#### CONCLUSION EXAMPLE:

Without a doubt, there are several reasons and causes for a country's life expectancy to be higher or lower, many of which go beyond traditional factors such as healthcare and environmental factors. Based on the evidence, it is possible to surmise that in addition to the more obvious factors already stated, a country's system of government and role in the economy, as well as its citizens' right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, most likely play a role in determining life expectancy. Though the United States and China have drastically different forms of government and traditions of individual rights, however, the gap isn't nearly as wide as one would expect, suggesting factors other than just form of government as playing a significant role in shaping life expectancy. As we move more and more toward a global world, one in which political boundaries are increasingly being torn down or made obsolete due to globalization, humanity will hopefully come into a time where the life expectancy gap is narrowed for all nations. To be clear, though, the goal should be more than a simple narrowing of the gap or increasing the number of years lived in societies across the globe. More importantly, governments should strive to provide protections and infrastructure that improve the quality of life. Long life in the absence of factors that improve the human condition is simply long life, if not tediously long life.

**Comment:** Commentary (Cm) and/or analysis extends over several sentences. The Cm is always tied to "proving" the thesis. The final sentence provides a "clincher statement" of sorts that acts as a book end between the beginning and end of this "section".

**Comment:** Broad restatement of purpose/thesis. Notice that this is NOT a verbatim regurgitation of the words from intro.

**Comment:** Summary of main points and findings is recounted, again, using different wording and phrasing.

**Comment:** For beginning writers they often stop after a recap of their main points. The final part of the conclusion (the "stinger") provides a wonderful opportunity for you to bring the essay "full circle" by revisiting the intro style you employed in the beginning. In this case, the "big to little" intro is reversed in that it's now "little to big": *from the US and China to the world*. Beyond just "little to big", the author ties the issue of life expectancy into a much broader context, raising questions and providing a recommendation based on the findings.

## References

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