

November 2016

The Collins Writing Exchange

Ideas, Tips, and Resources on Writing from [Collins Education Associates](#)

Featured Writing Assignment

Comparing and Contrasting

Identifying similarities and differences when considering two or more things, such as people, objects, ideas, or procedures, is a fundamental thinking process embedded in much of what we consider higher-order thinking. The key to effective comparisons is identifying important characteristics and then systematically using them to identify similarities and differences.

*Essential
Writing
Assignment*

Making these systematic comparisons is not intuitive for all our students. They need instruction, support, and practice. Use these Collins assignments and graphic organizers to help your students systematically analyze similarities and differences.

- Elementary: [Writing a Piece for a Classroom Time Capsule](#)
- Middle School: [Comparing and Contrasting to Clarify a Misunderstanding](#)
- High School: [Similar, but Different: Comparing and Contrasting When the Differences Are Subtle](#)

Special Note:

As you plan for the year, consider having a Collins Associate demonstrate Comparing and Contrasting or other lessons in your school's classrooms. Contact us at info@collinsed.com or at 1-800-932-4477.

FAQ: Featuring Gary Chadwell, Collins Associate and Author

Does Handwriting Still Matter?

Why can't students write in cursive? Who's teaching it? How much emphasis should be put on handwriting? Is cursive writing still relevant?

As someone who hears these questions almost daily, Collins Associate Gary Chadwell couldn't resist Anne Trubek's new book, *The History and Uncertain Future of Handwriting*. See how Trubek's book influenced Chadwell's answer to [Does Handwriting Still Matter?](#)



Action Research

Can Blog Writing Develop Writing Skills?



Leah Goldberg, a middle school teacher in Boston, did a yearlong study with her seventh and eighth grade students to see if blogging would improve their writing skills. She hypothesized that writing for more authentic purposes and audiences in school would increase students' interest, investment, and accessibility to academic writing assignments.

Her urban school initiative included many students who were English language learners. There were challenges, but Goldberg's findings were encouraging.

Now in her third year using the Collins Writing Program, Goldberg recently returned from Matsuyama, Japan, where she presented the findings from her study at the Japan-US Education Consortium (JUSTEC) conference. See an [overview of the study](#) or access her [complete write-up](#).

Convention Wisdom

The Semicolon: Life Beyond the Emoji

;-) Like it or not, emoticons are part of our lives now. Some blame a Carnegie-Mellon scientist for first using the smiley face and winky face emoticons in an email back in 1982. Some English teachers even advise students to limit their semicolon use to the omnipresent emojis.

But the semicolon serves two very important functions for writers that shouldn't be eliminated from a student's toolbox: (1) connecting closely related sentences and (2) separating list items that have commas in them.

Provide your students with a helpful Tip Sheet on semicolons from the Teacher Resource Guide (TRG) of our popular *Essential Conventions* Check Mate guides. Choose the elementary, middle school, or high school level appropriate for your students.

- [TRG Level A \(grades 4-6\)](#)
- [TRG Level B \(grades 6-9\)](#)
- [TRG Level C \(grades 9-12\)](#)

Special Note:

For more tips on navigating the rules of writing, see *Check Mate*, the student

guide for capitalization and other essential conventions. Or order the Essential Conventions Teacher Resource Guide (\$25 for the PDF version; \$30 for the hard copy) from our [web store](#). You can also [download free Samplers](#) of each Essential Conventions Teacher Resource Guide to try with your students.

Quick Links

Compare and Contrast Matrices for Systematic Analysis

Before students summarize similarities and differences on a Venn diagram, they need a way to systematically compare and contrast two or more items. That means identifying characteristics to be compared and then carefully considering each item. Use the [compare and contrast matrices](#) from our Free Resources page to help make this complex task more concrete for your students.

Comparing and Contrasting Matrix

Name: _____

Date: _____

Type: _____	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	How Similar or Different?
Characteristic 1				

Upcoming Events

John Collins in Pennsylvania, Kristine Gibson in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Bill Atwood in New Hampshire



Date	Session	Presenter	Grades	Location
December 4-6, 2016	Math + Writing = A Formula for Success	Kristine Gibson	3-8	SAS & IU5, Hershey, PA
December 8, 2016	Math + Writing = A Formula for Success	Kristine Gibson	3-8	AMTNJ, East Windsor, NJ
January 10, 2017	Four Essential Writing Assignments Details Register	Kristine Gibson	4-12	MUJC, New Providence, NJ
January 18, 2017	Tell a Story About a Time . . . Improving Narrative Writing	Bill Atwood	1-8	SERESC, Bedford, NH

January 25, 2017	Designing Curriculum-Based Writing Assignments	John Collins	4-12	CIU13, Lancaster, PA
February 6, 2017	Meeting the Challenge of the PA Core (Day 2)	Kristine Gibson	K-3	AIU8, Altoona, PA
February 9, 2017	Math & Science Vocabulary	Bill Atwood	2-12	SERESC, Bedford, NH
February 28, 2017	<i>How Did You Get That? Improving Open-Ended Responses in Mathematics</i> Details Register	Kristine Gibson	4-12	MUJC, New Providence, NJ

[View more training events here.](#)

New offerings are added regularly, so if you don't see something in your area, check back soon.

Collins In-Service

Professional Development for Your Staff

Would you like to speak to a Collins Associate about offering a professional development session in your school or district? [Email us](#) or call us at 800-932-4477 to learn about options and pricing or to set up a FREE phone consultation. We offer highly competitive rates and will customize the training to suit your school's needs.

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