General Structures of Compare and Contrast Writing

For younger children, the whole idea of compare and contrast (c/c) is brand new, and you should make it as concrete as possible. To introduce the idea, assemble the following:

- Two very similar, concrete objects that you can place in front of your student, say two pieces of fruit (We'll say they are an apple and a banana.)
- A copy of our Venn Diagram worksheet (found in the Supplements section of Writing Aids)
- Pencil (or pen)

Now, sit with your student and help him fill in the Venn Diagram for “apple” and “banana.” Start by telling him he is going to compare (tell how they are alike) and contrast (say how each one has differing qualities). Since you are doing this with a Level 3 student, you may want to do the writing for him during this initial exercise. Ask him leading questions:

- How are the banana and the apple the same? Both are:
  - fruit
  - good for snacks
  - can be used to make pies
  - have seeds in the middle
  - have similar colors of edible flesh within
  - have skins
  - both grow on trees

- How are they different?
  - apples are firmer than bananas,
  - the two have different colors and shapes on the outside
  - one generally eat the apple's skin but not the banana's
  - the trees they grow on look different
  - the two fruits grow in different climates.

- You may need to help your child think of categories. Categories would be things like:
  - type of food
  - color
  - hard or soft
  - Peel before eating?
  - When to eat, or how?
  - Seeds?

As you question him, the student will categorize and organize his information so that the comparisons are obvious to him. Below is a sample Venn Diagram that is somewhat complete.
Structures of Compare and Contrast Paragraphs and Reports

Once you’ve taught the concept of compare/contrast, it’s time to begin teaching your student about organizing the correct structure of compare/contrast paragraphs or papers. Each time he starts, your student can choose one of two standard c/c structures.

* Compare each similarity and difference, sentence by sentence, within one paragraph. For instance, the topic sentence for this format might be: Both apples and bananas are fruits, but I could tell them apart blindfolded. Apples are round, but bananas are long and skinny. Etc. For this format, you need a strong topic sentence and a strong conclusion to tie all the details together.

* Use two paragraphs, each with a strong topic sentence, to first compare all the similarities and then contrast all the differences.
  - So, using our example, the first paragraph will be about apples, and discuss first the color, then the texture (inside and out) and then the scientific aspects—classification, type of tree and climate on which it grows, and that it’s a fruit.
  - The second paragraph will be about bananas. To keep strict parallelism, the student will first discuss the color, then the texture (inside and out) and then the scientific aspects—classification, type of tree and climate on which it grows, and that it’s a fruit, just as with the apple.

With either of the above formats, it’s important to have a strong opening sentence (or for a paper, a short, introductory paragraph) and a strong “summing up” of the paragraph (or for a paper, a concluding paragraph) as a conclusion.