

Compare & Contrast Essay: Topic Narrowing/Expanding Guide

Use this guide to adjust topics that are too broad or too narrow so they fit your assignment length and allow meaningful analysis.

1. How to Identify a Topic That Is Too Broad

A topic is too broad if:

- It covers large historical periods, multiple theories, or entire fields.
- You cannot list specific comparison criteria without becoming superficial.
- You would need far more than the assigned word count to analyze it.

Examples of overly broad topics:

- Eastern vs Western philosophy
 - Social media vs traditional media
 - Renewable vs nonrenewable energy sources (without specifying type, region, or context)
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2. How to Narrow a Broad Topic

Use one or more of the strategies below.

A. Focus on a Subtopic or Specific Example

Broad: Eastern vs Western philosophy

Narrowed: Confucian vs Aristotelian virtue ethics

B. Limit the Time Period

Broad: Renaissance vs Baroque art

Narrowed: Early Renaissance vs High Renaissance techniques

C. Limit the Context or Application

Broad: Social media vs traditional media

Narrowed: Twitter vs newspapers as political news sources

D. Focus on One Theme or Element

Broad: Renewable vs nonrenewable energy

Narrowed: Solar power vs wind power efficiency in urban areas

Worksheet Section: Narrow Your Topic

Write your broad topic:

Narrowed options:

1.

2.

3.

3. How to Identify a Topic That Is Too Narrow

A topic is too narrow if:

- You struggle to find at least three meaningful comparison criteria.
- There is limited research or almost no credible sources.
- The comparison feels trivial or overly specific.

Examples of overly narrow topics:

- Compare two poems by the same author written in the same week
- Compare two smartphone models with only one minor difference
- Compare two identical teaching methods from the same class session

4. How to Expand a Narrow Topic

Use one or more of the strategies below.

A. Add More Comparison Criteria

Narrow: Comparing only cost of two diets

Expanded: Compare cost, nutritional value, accessibility, and long-term health impact

B. Broaden the Subject Slightly

Narrow: Two poems written by the same author

Expanded: The author's overall treatment of a shared theme in two works

C. Add Context or Purpose

Narrow: Two local recycling programs

Expanded: Recycling programs in two different cities with contrasting population sizes

D. Include a Larger Category

Narrow: Organic apples vs regular apples

Expanded: Organic farming vs conventional farming practices

Worksheet Section: Expand Your Topic

Write your narrow topic:

Expanded options:

1.

2.

3.

5. Final Scope Check

Your topic is appropriately scoped if:

- It supports at least three substantial comparison criteria
- You can find credible sources for both subjects
- You can analyze it meaningfully within your assigned word count
- It avoids being overly general or overly specific

Does your final topic meet all criteria?

Yes / No

If No, adjust again using the guide above.