The IB Language A1 Paper Two is a timed analytical essay requiring comparison/contrast analysis of selected works in a genre study, which for us is *Prose—The Novel and Short Story.* The selected works are: *Beloved, Jane Eyre, A Handmaid’s Tale*, and, for HL only, *Ethan Frome*. You will prepare for the exam by creating a Comparative Chart.

Your Study Guide for the Paper Two will be the Comparative Chart. You will first identify what you need to know and how you wish to arrange the information. You will then create a document that records, compares, and contrasts information so that you can review. The information you choose to record should include (but is not limited to):

* function and importance of plot, setting, and time
* evolution of various themes
* significance of characters and variations of characterization
* narrative structure/role of narrator
* point of view and its effect
* significant quotations
* effect of a particular dichotomy (age/youth, black/white, interiors/exteriors)
* significant motifs and their thematic implications
* presence of satirical elements
* tone and its relationship to voice
* role of irony and its relationship to voice
* role of violence, home, nature, women, etc. (you decide)
* stylistic features and their effect

Look at the link on my web site, “Fifteen Years of Paper Two Topics” (under ‘Seniors’ and ‘General’) for additional ideas.

**Words of Advice**

It is better to choose topics that require you to think analytically. Avoid categories that only require lists (‘Characters’ or ‘Setting’) or categories that tempt one to oversimplify (‘Tone’ or ‘Theme”).

Make sure your chart allows for expansion. A new category may occur to you while you are engaged with the final work.

Make sure that you concentrate on comparison and contrast.

While I do require an individual document from each of you, it is permissible to collaborate to an extent. That is, you may consult with your colleagues as to categories and evidence, you may debate comparisons and contrasts, you may study each other’s charts, but you must turn in your own work.

Exam Paper 2 requires students to compare and contrast at least two of the Part 3 works studied in regard to one of three genre-specific questions. The allotted time is two hours for HL and one hour and 30 minutes for SL. Part of the expectation for this task is that students offer a ‘personal response,’ which means that you approach the question with fresh insights based on your knowledge and understanding of the texts. Choosing a question that engages you on more than one level is always a wise option.

For a successful comparison/contrast essay, a common ground for comparison must exist—it doesn’t make sense to compare completely dissimilar things. **So, the first thing to do is find the common ground**—significant ideas or strategies the two texts share. For example, comparing one author’s view of love to another writer’s ideas about conformity will not be productive. But, *closer examination* of the two texts may reveal less obvious similarities in the treatment of women or the effects of voice. Very often, the question will define the common ground for your focus. The genre-specific questions are more likely to provide a specific, focused common ground than are the General Literature questions. Remember, the common ground may be clear, but the ***specifics* of similarity and difference** determine the overall effectiveness of the essay. Once you have established a basis of comparison, you will take notes and decide what to say. The next decision you will need to make is how to organize your essay.

Even in seemingly *dissimilar* works, you can find a basis for comparison and can make observations showing subtle similarities. Drawing inferences from these subtle similarities can produce an effective essay. Conversely, obviously *similar* topics, forms, or attitudes can yield effective essays. Rather than simply expounding on the obvious similarities, focus on the less obvious, the subtle differences that emerge on closer examination of the texts.

Always remember, *describing* similarity and difference is not the same as *evaluating* similarity and difference! You will need an evaluative thesis—a statement which forms the basis for your argument regarding similarity and difference in the two texts. Do not merely describe—take a stand.

The most important thing to remember about the Paper 2 comparative essay is that the question will almost certainly ask you to focus on the conventions of the genre that you have studied in Part 3, which in our case is the novel. The conventions are the techniques the writers use to achieve certain effects.

Typically, questions can be set in two forms. The first is a **quotation** that makes a generalization about the genre, concept, idea, theme, etc.

EX: “A novel’s setting, its home ground, very often plays a more active part in the plot than is first apparent.” How far does this remark apply to three of the works you have studied?

EX: “A well-written piece of prose should be unified.” Say how far you agree that a that a single unified impression is important to two or three works you have studied.

The second type of question does not include a quotation. These questions may ask you to **evaluate the success of a strategy** in two or three texts you have studied.

EX: Symbols and/or motifs are an essential element of many novels and short stories. How have either or both of these devices been used and, in your opinion, how successfully, in two or three of the works you have studied?

**Steps in Writing a Comparison/Contrast Essay**

1. Consider the texts. Are they more similar or different? Decide. Then formulate a **general conclusion** of either similarity or difference. It’s OK to be obvious here.
2. From that generalization, explore the more subtle similarities or differences that

emerge. If your generalization observes similarity, then focus on subtle differences; if

the generalization observes difference, focus on the subtle similarities. Then formulate

conclusions about the subtle similarities or differences. Here is where you go beyond

the obvious. **This is your thesis**. It must take a stand; it must be arguable.

1. Your introductory paragraph

a) Begin with your initial generalization of *either* similarity *or* difference with

supporting examples from each text.

b) After the supporting details, come the conclusions about subtle similarities

or differences that emerge from the generalization, i.e., your thesis. **Your**

**essay becomes, with your arguable thesis, either comparison or**

**contrast but not both.**

1. Body Paragraphs

a) Each body paragraph has a topic sentence—an arguable assertion—a

conclusion you have drawn from the subtle similarities or differences in the

texts. This is a point-by-point analysis.

b) Each body paragraph includes 3 pieces of evidence from each text to support

each subtle similarity or difference noted in your thesis.

1. Concluding Paragraph – **Avoid mechanical restatements**; you want a fresh,

insightful look at your thesis. You might consider the effect on the reader. The effect could be intellectual, emotional, or both. What emotion or idea remains when the text is closed?

1. **Check your work.**