Guidelines for writing comparison poetry essay:

There are two schools of thought, generally, on how to write a good comparison essay:
1. A comparison paragraph(s) and a contrast paragraph(s)
2. An interpretation of one poem and then a comparison of the second to the first.

Either choice is equally valuable. You need to decide on your comfort level with the choices. Things to think about, however, when writing these two different formats include the following:

**Compare/Contrast**

1. In order to have good flow in your writing, you’ll want to avoid making the reader feel like they are following the ball at a tennis match. In other words, you don’t want every sentence to be a back and forth between the two choices. That would look like this: “Poem A has a propensity for metaphors like ‘the curtain of night.’ Poem B doesn’t make use of metaphor so much as imagery as in line 10 where the poet claims ‘the wallpaper had a yellow smell.’ Poem A goes on to say . . . Poem B in contrast . . .”

   Don’t make your reader dizzy by going back and forth too often. When you make a point, be sure to thoroughly explain it, give your evidence, explain it, then move to the other poem.
2. So, you’ll cover the comparison completely and the contrasting elements completely in separate sections.

**One poem then other**

1. **Completely cover one poem answering the prompt.** Then compare/contrast the 2nd poem to the first. This way, you avoid the potential for the tennis match problem. Your paper then, starts off with a focus on one poem only. The second part where you cover the next poem can be split into a comparison section and then a contrast, but doesn’t have to be.
2. **The trick here, however, is that you don’t a.) run out of time and don’t cover the 2nd poem completely, and b.) you cover only comparison or contrast and not both.**

In both cases,

1. you’ll need to be sure you handle the question prompt fully.
2. be sure to use direct quotes from the poem.
3. notice if the question asks for specific elements or suggests specific elements.
ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II
Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the two poems below, Keats and Longfellow reflect on similar concerns. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing the poetic techniques each writer uses to explore his particular situation.

Mezzo Cammin

Written at Boppard on the Rhine August 25, 1842, Just Before Leaving for Home

When I Have Fears

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean’d my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripen’d grain;
When I behold, upon the night’s starr’d face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

Half of my life is gone, and I have let
The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
The aspiration of my youth, to build
Some tower of song with lofty parapet.
Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret
Of restless passions that would not be stilled,
But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,
Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past
Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—
A city in the twilight dim and vast,
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—
And hear above me on the autumnal blast
The cataract\(^2\) of Death far thundering from the heights.

1818 —John Keats (1795-1821)

1842 —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

1 The title is from the first line of Dante’s Divine Comedy: “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita” (“Midway upon the journey of our life”).

2 A large waterfall

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Both poems by Keats and Longfellow reflect on untutored dreams and the imminence of death, yet their conclusions are somewhat different. Longfellow mourns his inaction and seems to view the past as comfortable compared to an uncertain future. On the other hand, Keats worries that he will not be able to accomplish all that he wants to, but as he recognizes the enormity and possibility of the world, he realizes that his mortal goals are meaningless. Longfellow's ultimate tone about death is fearful and grim, but Keats' is more appreciative of the wonder of life and therefore more hopeful.

The similarities between the poems lie mainly in the openings which begrudge the fleeting nature of life. Keats' fear that he "may cease to be" parallels Longfellow's statement that "half of [his] life is gone." The men continue to express their fears about not having the time or being able to accomplish what they want to. Keats' repetition of the word "before," as an anaphora, emphasizes his concern that he may die before he is able to attain his literary goals or harness the opportunity of "the full ripe'd grain," a simile for the possibility that he sees in his work. Longfellow, too, acknowledges his failure to "fulfill the aspiration of [his youth]" and "build some tower of song with lofty parapet," which is similar to Keats' hope to leave behind his legacy of words. The beginnings of the poems both depict men who fear that time is running...
The middle, or second parts, of the poems illustrate the contrast between the two situations. In lines 5, Keats starts to talk about the beauty and mystery of love with images of "shadows" and "huge cloudy symbols of a high romance." He seems to believe that love comes by fate, and he is saddened to miss out on such "chance" when it comes time for him to die. He speaks of never having had the opportunity to "look upon thee more" and indulge in innocent, "unreflecting love," showing that he has experienced love before but now his chances are ruined because he is so aware of death. Longfellow's poem takes a different tone as he says he has not experienced "pleasure" or "passions," but has experienced "sorrow" and too much "care" which has paralyzed him. Longfellow's fear of death seems to completely stop him from accomplishing his goals, while Keats has taken advantage of the time that he has had and is merely scared now that he does not have time to continue living.

The end of the poems show these different attitudes toward life and death by using similar situations. Keats walks to a shore and Longfellow to a hill to contemplate life, and both look out before them. While Keats sees the "wide world" which alliteration emphasizes the possibility of, Longfellow looks out and sees a city as a metaphor for the past. Keats realizes that his goals for literary fame and love before he dies are "nothingness" compared to the grand sleep.
Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

of life. However Longfellow sees the "smoking woof, soft bells, and gleaming lights" of a lazy and idealized past with a clear and powerful waterfall of death night overheard. Keats seems to recognize the opportunity left in his life when he looks out, though it may be daunting, but Longfellow sees only a past haunted by death and no future to speak of.

Score = 8