Compare-Contrast Essay

**Score 4 Benchmark Paper**
The paper is completely focused on the topic and purpose given in the prompt. A clever introduction names the subjects, and a humorous conclusion sums up the main ideas. The writer uses one method of organization (feature-by-feature). Paragraphs have strong topic sentences. Transitional words make similarities and differences clear (*Like eagles, owls eat meat; on the other hand*) and help readers to navigate (*First, Last, Next, Finally*). Similarities and differences are elaborated with rich corresponding details for each subject. Mature command of language is evidenced by the use of many exact, interesting words and vivid similes (*razor-sharp talons, soaring in graceful circles, float like paper airplanes*). Smooth-flowing sentences are written in different ways.

**Score 3 Benchmark Paper**
The paper is focused on the topic and purpose. Although the introduction names the two subjects, and the conclusion sums up the ideas, neither is very interesting. Confusion is created by the use of more than one method of organization; paragraphs 2 and 3 tell about specific features (appearances, behavior), but paragraph 4 tells general similarities (teeth, jumping, diet). Topic sentences are strong, and many transitional words are used. Some specific details describe hamsters and gerbils (*about the size of a mouse, tail is long and furry, pushing its nose down into a big pile of wood shavings*), but vague word choice elsewhere makes other details less effective (*fur. . . feels really nice, funny cheeks, neat whiskers, Hamsters are much bigger, grains and vegetables*). Some corresponding details are missing (hamster’s tail, hamster’s exercise, gerbil’s level of nighttime activity). Many sentences are overly simple.

**Score 2 Benchmark Paper**
The paper is mostly focused on the topic and purpose but includes some unrelated details (food eaten at circus). The introduction doesn’t name the subjects, and the conclusion is abrupt. The writer uses more than one method of organization; paragraph 2 tells differences, paragraph 3 tells about a specific feature (strength), and paragraph 4 tells similarities. Paragraph 4 lacks a topic sentence, and more transitional words are needed throughout. Details are not balanced: many more similarities are mentioned than differences. Word choice is often immature (*skin is all weird looking, hangs out, go around a lot*). Sentences are varied overall, but most in paragraph 4 are simple and begin the same way (*Both*).
**Score 1 Benchmark Paper**  The writer attempts to focus on the topic and purpose, but because of an inappropriate topic choice (snakes and monkeys) is forced to write exclusively about differences. Organization is poor. The introduction is confusing and never names the two subjects. There is no conclusion. Related sentences are not grouped together, and details that describe the same feature for both subjects are not told in the same order. Word choice throughout is limited (*a lot alike, walks around, interesting*). Most sentences are simple and sound choppy.