

Compare and Contrasting Metaphors

Generating metaphors is just the first step. Once you generate a metaphor it helps to strengthen the metaphor and by strengthening it, you make the ideas more memorable, easier to recall in a test or assignment situation, but also you understand the ideas more deeply. And this is an important part, because if you just create weak metaphors, that don't really describe the target idea very well, and you don't really explore them; you don't really invest any time in strengthening them then often you've just created memory aids. A memory aid is something that helps you recall the idea but it doesn't help you understand the idea.

So we are going to go through one drill, which I call the compare and contrast method, as a way of strengthening a metaphor you've already created, so it becomes more useful in helping you understand the idea, and as well, making it easier to remember the target idea. So, the compare and contrast method has two parts. The first part is you look for extra similarities between the metaphor and the target idea. So, you may have had just a notion that there's one similarity, that there's something similar between the metaphor and the target concept. But you want to take that even further and look for other things, maybe there's other ways to the target concept is similar to the metaphor. The second part is you want to look for dissimilarities. You want to look for contrast between the metaphor and the target concept. Now this may at first feel like you're undoing a lot of your work. Why would I want to build myself up and think yes, this is a good metaphor, a good analogy? And then later tell myself, no, this is why it's not a good analogy, it may seem like you're undoing the work. But this is missing the point. Even if you are noticing a difference between ideas, that's still creating a connection in your mind. That's still creating a link between the two ideas, even if it's showing how the two are different or dissimilar.

So, let's go through the example of Price Elasticity of Demand, which is a concept from economics which is basically about how does demand change in response to price. So there is some goods and some products, if the price changes fairly dramatically, the same amount of people will still be willing to buy it. Because they need it so much or because it's the type of consumers they are. The price elasticity is; the price is very inelastic to the man. You can change the price and it won't affect the demand that much. In contrast there are price, there are goods and services that are very sensitive to price, so a simple change in price will quickly change the amount of demand that is being asked for those objects. So, this concept of Price Elasticity of Demand, I created the metaphor of a rubber band. So, some rubber bands are very old and worn-out and they don't stretch that much and other bands are very stretchy. So, this kind of creates this sort-of metaphor between, well demand sometimes it is very flexible and it will adjust to changes in price, changes in stretching ability. And other times it won't change much at all, it will be like an old rubber band that's very stiff. So, this is the basic metaphor.

Now, the first part compare, I want to look for more similarities. So another similarity is just that the amount of pull you put on something is very similar to the amount of price change you have. So, you can pull the elastic band or the rubber band even more and it will quickly change its shape and size. So that's like having a lot of price elasticity. And it could be very inelastic and that you can really put a lot of pressure on it and the size of the rubber band won't change. The actual demand, the size of the demand will not change. So that's the first similarity and I've done the compare method.

The next part is contrast, and I want to look for dissimilarities between my rubber band analogy and the Price Elasticity of Demand. And one similarity is that the demand adjusts in a gradient fashion. So, an inelastic price supply will in a linear or curved way slowly change the amount of demand, so it won't at one point abruptly change. However an elastic band isn't quite like that. If you have an old band that isn't very flexible, the rubber's kind-of dried out, if you pull it and you pull it too hard it will eventually snap and it will completely break. And this doesn't happen in actual price elasticity of demand. So, you can see how this metaphor is forcing me to think about both the metaphor and how it relates to the target idea. But also elements of the target idea, in this example the gradation, that it does not change all at once or abruptly that I hadn't considered with the first metaphor. And it's in thinking about these ideas, not specifically the outcome of creating a metaphor, or a better metaphor, but in thinking about these ideas and thinking about both the similarities and dissimilarities that I form a better understanding and a better memory of the underlying concept.