

Writing the Comparison Paper and Integrating Sources

Say I've read a book about, oh, wizards. The book is called *Dusk* and was written by Sock McLemon. I've decided to write a paper comparing *Dusk* to another piece of media about wizards, a television series called *True Magic*.

DECIDING WHAT TO COMPARE/WRITING YOUR THESIS: The first step is to figure out what I want to compare in the two stories. I decide to talk about how different the two stories are, and I narrow it down to the three biggest differences: the heroes are different, the powers they give wizards are different, and the villains are different.

OK! With that chosen, I can now write a thesis sentence. This will give me a shape for the rest of the essay. It should include:

- 1). The name of both pieces being compared
- 2). A hint to whether you'll be comparing or contrasting the two pieces
- 3). The criteria you'll be comparing them by

Here's a **sample thesis**:

Though they seem very similar, *Dusk* and *True Magic* actually differ significantly in their choices of hero, the way they depict the powers of a wizard, and in their chosen villains.

- **NOTE:** Because *Dusk* is a book, it is italicized when I refer to it. When I'm talking about the entire series *True Magic*, it's considered a long work, so I italicize it. When I talk about individual episodes, like "The One With All the Magic," then those are short works, and we put them in quotations.

OUTLINE AND STRUCTURE: The thesis actually gives me the structure of the rest of the paper:

Though they seem very similar, *Dusk* and *True Magic* actually differ significantly in their choices of hero, the way they depict the powers of a wizard, and in their chosen villains.

So now I know that my first point for comparison (in yellow) will be my first comparison paragraph, the second point (in green) will be the second comparison paragraph, and the third (in blue) will be my third comparison paragraph.

A rough outline of the paper in Point by Point format would look like this:

Paragraph 1:	Introduction, ending in a thesis statement explaining that this will be a paper contrasting the two topics on three different points.
Paragraph 2:	Might be used to quickly summarize both works for readers who don't know much about <i>Dusk</i> and <i>True Magic</i> . (<i>This is optional for papers that deal with works that the audience wouldn't be familiar with</i>)
Paragraph 3:	Discusses the ways that the hero is different in both works, starting with <i>Dusk</i> , then moving to <i>True Magic</i> .
Paragraph 4:	Discusses the ways that wizard powers are shown in both pieces and how they're different, starting with <i>Dusk</i> , then moving to <i>True Magic</i> .
Paragraph 5:	Discusses the ways that the villain is different in both works, starting with <i>Dusk</i> , then moving to <i>True Magic</i> .
Paragraph 6:	Conclusion, beginning with a re-stated thesis.

DRAFTING: Now that the format is settled, it's time to begin writing. A first draft can often be drawn just from personal experience or memory of the topics. I can write here just to figure out what I already know about the topic.

- NOTE: It's often easiest to start with the first body paragraph and save writing the introduction for last.

FIRST DRAFT OF FIRST BODY PARAGRAPH

In *Dusk*, the hero is a teenaged girl who goes to a normal high school. She's pretty and kind of smart but doesn't have a lot of friends. When she meets the new wizard in school, Ted, she's surprised that he's interested in her at all. This is completely different from *True Magic*. The main character in this series is Raymond, a 30-year-old auto mechanic who seems to work for his father's body shop. Raymond has tons of friends and was very popular in high school, but Raymond has a secret. He was recruited into the Wizard Protection Service while he was in the Army, and now he goes out some nights to help find and protect wizards who are about to be exposed to public attention.

This is an OK start for a first draft of the first body paragraph. It names the pieces that I want to compare in my first section: the **heroes**, Ella and Raymond. For a second draft, though, I need to go deeper.

NEXT DRAFT OF FIRST POINT FOR COMPARISON

In *Dusk*, the hero is Ella, a normal, unconfident teenaged girl who goes to a boring high school in Spoons, Washington. Nothing exciting has ever happened to Ella. She's often bored and lonely, and even though she's pretty and friendly, she doesn't have many friends because she's only lived in Spoons for a few years. When, in the first book, she meets Bedward, a popular wizard, she's surprised that he's interested in her at all. In fact, at first, she thinks it's a joke when he asks her to the prom. She's also very surprised when she later finds out about his special powers because she's never really seen or heard of wizards before. This sets up interesting conflicts for the rest of the book, as Ella is introduced to an entirely new world – and a new romance – with Bedward.

In *True Magic*, on the other hand, the main character is a confident thirtyish man named Raymond. Raymond, unlike Ella, is very popular in his hometown of Bullpen, Georgia. He's lived there his whole life, and now he seems to work in his father's auto-body shop – but actually, Raymond has a secret. He's been employed in the Wizard Protection Service since his stint in the Army, and so, in contrast to Ella, he's not at all surprised when he meets the town's new wizard, Alfie. Although Raymond should report Alfie to his superiors, he decides to befriend him, instead, and let him stay in Bullpen. This story depends upon the unlikely friendship that grows between Raymond and Alfie to provide conflict and intrigue as things carry on.

INTEGRATING SOURCES: Once a first draft, an “idea draft,” is written, what remains is to provide further proof of your claims. So let's look at what, in this text, is a claim of fact, and what is an opinion or your own analysis. **Facts** versus **Opinions/Analysis**

In *Dusk*, the hero is Ella, a normal, unconfident teenaged girl who goes to a boring high school in Spoons, Washington. Nothing exciting has ever happened to Ella. She's often bored and lonely, and even though she's pretty and friendly, she doesn't have many friends because she's only lived in Spoons for a few years. When, in the first book, she meets Bedward, a popular wizard, she's surprised that he's interested in her at all. In fact, at first, she thinks it's a joke when he asks her to the prom. She's also very surprised when she later finds out about his special powers because she's never really seen or heard of wizards before. This sets up interesting conflicts for the rest of the book, as Ella is introduced to an entirely new world – and a new romance – with Bedward.

In *True Magic*, on the other hand, the main character is a confident thirtyish man named Raymond. Raymond, unlike Ella, is very popular in his hometown of Bullpen, Georgia. He's lived there his whole life, and now he seems to work in his father's auto-body shop – but actually, Raymond has a secret. He's been employed in the Wizard Protection Service since his stint in the Army, and so, in contrast to Ella, he's not at all surprised when he meets the town's new wizard, Alfie. Although Raymond should report Alfie to his superiors, he decides to befriend him, instead, and let him stay in Bullpen. This story depends upon the unlikely friendship that grows between Raymond and Alfie to provide conflict and intrigue as things carry on.

The parts in blue are parts that I can prove by sending the reader to the text itself. I can say, “Well, you can tell Ella isn’t very confident. Just look at the scene where she keeps shaking the whole time she’s talking to Bedward’s creepy sister!”

A New School

Ella went to Claymore Mines High School, a very normal suburban school framed by stands of weak pine trees. The whole school smelled like an air freshener because the trees were constantly breaking and releasing pine scent from their broken branches. Nothing had ever happened that was particularly interesting at CMHS, unless you counted the spring that the principal went a little crazy and made every day pajama day, but that had been long before Ella’s time. She had only moved back to Spoons, Washington, a year ago, to live with her mother in a shack in the woods, and so the customs of the school were pretty foreign to her.

On her first day, she spent most of her morning in the principal’s office, hearing about

The parts in yellow might be proven by reading the book, too, but they also require the reader to analyze what they’ve read. Maybe they would disagree that Raymond is the hero; maybe they would disagree that it’s the romance that carries a reader through *Dusk*. These are the parts where a reader would have to talk to you to understand the meaning – you’re the source of the analysis, so you don’t have to provide a citation.

For the blue parts, we need to go to the book and find actual examples of what we’re talking about. So, I need to find a place where *Dusk* describes Ella’s high school. Lucky for me, that happens on page 18, as you can see here.

There, in the third sentence, the book clearly states that this isn’t a high school where interesting things happen. Now that I’ve found my source material, I have two choices:

1. Quote directly
2. Paraphrase

I should **quote** a source directly – meaning I take the exact words from the work and include them in my own, between quotation marks – when the source says something better than I can, when the source says something controversial that I want to make clear is coming directly from them, or when the source offers technical information that would be difficult to re-word. Here, if I thought that the book proved that Ella’s school was boring better than I could, I would quote it like this:

In *Dusk*, the hero is Ella, a normal, unconfident teenaged girl. Ella attends Claymore Mines High School, which is very boring. “Nothing had ever happened that was particularly interesting at CHMS,” though the principal was a bit kooky (McLemon 18).

The citation I use (McLemon 18) gives the author's last name and the page number on which my material is found. By putting it at the end of the sentence, I'm saying that everything in this sentence comes directly from that page.

If I decide that this isn't a particularly interesting quote (and it's not), then I should **paraphrase**. Paraphrasing means you take someone else's words (her "phrase") and you re-word it (para, in Greek, means "beside" or "to the side of"). You can't steal words from the original to do this, so you want to make sure that what you're saying is all your own phrasing, while you cannot actually alter the meaning of the original author.

I could paraphrase the above like this:

In *Dusk*, the hero is Ella, a normal, unconfident teenaged girl. Ella attends Claymore Mines High School, a run-of-the-mill, predictably boring small-town school with a kooky principal (McLemon 18).

I still have to cite the source at the end of the sentence; even though I'm not using her words, I'm still representing her ideas.

Now, any time I put a source into the text of my piece, I also need to make sure that there's a citation in my Works Cited page (a separate page at the end of the paper) for that source. I'm citing *Dusk* by Sock McLemon. It's a book, and I know from its title page and copyright page that it was published in 2010 by Fake Publishers in New York.

So my entry would look like this:

McLemon, Sock. *Dusk*. New York: Fake Publishers, 2010.

- NOTE: You can find examples of how to cite many sources in your textbook or by visiting <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.

The first piece of information that appears on any entry in your works cited page is what you're going to use in your in-text citation. Because I have McLemon as my author, that's what I use in my in-text citation (McLemon pg#).

That's easy enough with a work like *Dusk* that has a clear author, but what if I'm using something that has no clear author? Say I decide to do some online research, and I go to the Official Dusk Fan Site to back up my claim that *Dusk* is the most popular wizard series among women ages 20-34. There's an article there called "Here's How Much We Love Dusk!" but no author is listed – it's mostly a list of facts from the site itself.

If I wanted to cite this in my paper, I'd use the page's title, "Here's How Much We Love Dusk," as my first piece of information.



My MLA Works Cited page would have this entry:

"Here's How Much We Love Dusk!" *Official Dusk Fan Site*. Dusk Fan Media. 14 February 2010. Web. 20 October 2010.

This means that when I want to cite the work in the rest of my paper, I use what comes first on the Works Cited Page in my parentheses. Because I don't have a page number, I would use just the title. So, it would work like this:

In fact, *Dusk* is actually more popular among adult readers, specifically among women ages 20-34, who flock to official fan sites in droves ("Here's How Much We Love Dusk").

You will always need as much information as possible about your sources. If you're looking for new sources as you go, it's a very good idea to keep a working bibliography (list of sources) so that you can refer back to each one when you're writing.

One easy way to keep your sources straight is to write down their information on note cards or to keep a file on your computer just with source information. For every source you use, answer the following questions:

1. Who wrote or created this?
2. What is the full title?
3. When was it first published?
4. Where was it first published (city, state, or country)
5. Have there been multiple editions of this work or web site? What edition is this?
6. Are there named editors or translators?
7. Who is the publisher or sponsor of this work?
8. For online works:
 - a. When did you first see it (date of access)?
 - b. What is the complete URL (online address) if you need to find it again?
 - c. What's the title of the larger web site or blog that this comes from (if there is one)?

SAMPLE NOTE CARDS:

<i>Dusk</i>
<i>Author: Sock McLemon</i>
<i>Published: 2010</i>
<i>Publisher: Fake Publishers, New York</i>
<i>Summary: This is the first book in the</i>
<i>series.</i>

<i>"Here's How Much We Love Dusk"</i>
<i>http://officialduskfansite.com/facts.htm</i>
<i>Author: None</i>
<i>Publisher: Dusk Fan Media</i>
<i>Web site: OfficialDuskFanSite.com</i>
<i>Web site title: Official Dusk Fan Site.</i>
<i>Date Published: February 14, 2010.</i>
<i>Date Accessed: October 20, 2010</i>
<i>Summary: List of facts about fans of Dusk.</i>