Writing the Comparison Paper and Integrating Sources

Print this out and use it as a resource as you begin to write your comparison paper.

**FIRST: Choose the subjects to be compared.**

EXAMPLE: Mario's favorite book is about sparkling wizards. The book is called *Dusk*. He's decided to write a paper comparing *Dusk* to another piece of media about wizards, a television series called *The Wizards of Wherever.* These are his two subjects.

YOUR SUBJECTS:

_____

Subject A


_____

Subject B

**STEP TWO: Decide on the points of comparison or contrast**

EXAMPLE: The next step for Mario is to figure out what he wants to compare (similarities) or contrast (differences) in the two stories. First, he makes a list of the many things that are similar and different in the two stories.

| *Dusk* | *Wizards of Wherever* |
|---|---|
| Main character is a normal high school girl | Main character is a thirty-something guy who works in a wizard protection program |
| She falls in love with a wizard | He falls in love with a witch |
| Wizards are immortal and live in special castles | Wizards and witches live like normal people and have regular lifespan |
| They can breathe underwater | They can do small amounts of magic |
| The villain is another wizard who lives underground and tries to sway above-ground wizards to join his side | The villain is a non-wizard who thinks wizards are dangerous and uses government powers to kill them |

He decides to talk about how different the two stories are (a contrast paper), and he narrows it down to the three biggest differences: the heroes are different, the powers they give wizards are different, and the villains are different.

The three major differences or similarities that you choose for your paper are the points of comparison or contrast. Once you know what the points of comparison will be, you can write your thesis and choose a format for the paper.

The thesis will give you 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 Mario's sample thesis:

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

The thesis actually gives a writer the structure of the rest of the paper:

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

So now Mario has his first point for comparison (in yellow), the second point (in green), and the third (in blue).

There are two common formats for Comparison Papers: Subject by Subject and Point by Point.

In a subject by subject essay, you write first about one subject, covering all of the points of comparison in its section. Then, you write about the other subject, covering the same points for comparison. An outline of a Subject by Subject paper would look like this:

I. Introduction
II. Subject A
        A. Point 1
        B. Point 2
        C. Point 3
III. Subject B
        A. Point 1
        B. Point 2
        C. Point 3
IV. Conclusion

A short comparison paper would have likely only four paragraphs total. A longer paper might expand and have two paragraphs on each subject, or three. What's important is that each part covers the same information in the same order.

So, for Mario's paper, an outline might look like this in Subject by Subject format:

| First Paragraph: | Introduction, ending in a thesis statement explaining that this will be a paper contrasting the two topics on three different points. |
|---|---|
| Section 2: | Discusses Subject A (*Dusk).* This section might start with a brief summary of *Dusk* for readers who are unfamiliar with the story. Then, it would discuss the ==hero== of *Dusk*, the way ==wizard powers== are used in the book, and the book's ==villain==. |
| Section 3: | Discusses Subject B (*Wizards of Wherever).* This section might start with a brief summary of *Wizards of Wherever* for readers who are unfamiliar with the story. Then, it would discuss the ==hero== of *Wizards*, the way ==wizard powers== are used in the book, and the book's ==villain==. |
| Final Paragraph: | Conclusion, beginning with a re-stated thesis. |

The advantage to writing in Subject by Subject format is that you have plenty of time to discuss both subjects at length. If you're writing about a work that your audience doesn't know much about, you can take the time to write a paragraph of summary for each subject before you launch into the comparison points.

The disadvantage is that Subject by Subject papers rely on your reader to have a very good memory. If the first Subject takes up a page and a half, by the time they get to the middle of the second Subject, they may not remember the points you made about the first subject!

The other format that's commonly used to write a Comparison and/or Contrast Essay is Point by Point format. In Point by Point, the general outline looks like this:

I. Intro
II. Point 1
      A. Subject A
      B. Subject B
III. Point 2
      A. Subject A
      B. Subject B
IV. Point 2
      A. Subject A
      B. Subject B
V. Conclusion

Each paragraph has a topic sentence that discusses the point of comparison that's going to be addressed and then talks about the two pieces in order.

A rough outline of Mario's 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 *Dusk* and *Wizards of Wherever. (This is optional for papers that deal with works that the audience wouldn't be familiar with)* |
| Paragraph 3: | Discusses the ways that the ==hero== is different in both works, starting with *Dusk*, then moving to *Wizards of Wherever*. |
| Paragraph 4: | Discusses the ways that ==wizard powers== are shown in both pieces and how they're different, starting with *Dusk*, then moving to *Wizards of Wherever*. |
| Paragraph 5: | Discusses the ways that the ==villain== is different in both works, starting with *Dusk*, then moving to *Wizards of Wherever*. |
| Paragraph 6: | Conclusion, beginning with a re-stated thesis. |

The advantage to choosing a Point by Point format is that the comparisons are made right next to each other, so the reader can immediately see how the two subjects line up. The disadvantage can be that the reader will feel jerked back and forth between points quickly. This can be a little distracting and feel like you're watching a ping-pong tournament.

Both formats are completely useful and correct for writing a first comparison essay. You can choose whichever one feels more natural to you.

**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.

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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, Bedward, she's surprised that he's interested in her at all. This is completely different from *Wizards of Wherever*. 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.

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This is an OK start for a first draft of Mario's first body paragraph. It names the pieces that he wants to compare in his first section: the ==heroes==, Ella and Raymond. For a second draft, though, he needs to think bigger and be more specific.

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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 *Wizards of Wherever*, 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.

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**INTEGRATING SOURCES**: Once a first draft, an "idea draft," is written, what remains is to provide further proof of yours claims. So let's look at what, in this text, is a claim of fact, and what is an opinion or Mario's 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 *Wizards of Wherever*, 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 Mario can prove by sending the reader to the text itself. He 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

The parts in yellow might be proven by reading the book, too, but they also require the reader to analyze and form their own ideas about 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 Mario has found his source material, he has two choices:

1.  Quote directly
2.  Paraphrase

A writer should **quote** a source directly – meaning he or she takes the exact words from the work and includes them in his or her own, between quotation marks – when the source says something better than the writer can, when the source says something controversial that the writer wants to make clear is coming directly from the source, or when the source offers technical information that would be difficult to re-word. Here, if Mario thought that the book proved that Ella's school was boring better than he could, he 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 he uses (McLemon 18) gives the author's last name and the page number on which his material is found. By putting it at the end of the sentence, Mario is saying that everything in this sentence comes directly from that page.

If Mario decides that this isn't a particularly interesting quote (and it's not), then he 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.

Mario 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).

He still has to cite the source at the end of the sentence; even though he's not using her words, he's still representing her ideas.

Now, any time a writer puts a source into the text of his or her piece, he or she also needs to make sure that there's a citation in his or her Works Cited page (a separate page at the end of the paper) for that source. Mario is citing *Dusk* by Sock McLemon. It's a book, and he knows from its title page and copyright page that it was published in 2010 by Fake Publishers in New York.

So his entry would look like this:

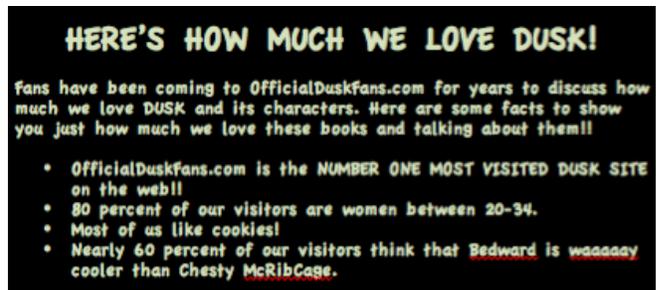> McLemon, Sock. *Dusk*. New York: Fake Publishers, 2010.

➢ NOTE: In Writing 115 and 121, you'll be required to buy a grammar and style guide that will explain all of these citations. For now, you can find examples of how to cite many sources (for free!) 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 Mario decides to use something that has no clear author? Say he decides to do some online research, and he goes to the Official Dusk Fan Site to back up his 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 he wanted to cite this in his paper, he'd use the page's title, "Here's How Much We Love Dusk," as his first piece of information.

His MLA Works Cited page would have this entry:



**HERE'S HOW MUCH WE LOVE DUSK!**

fans have been coming to OfficialDuskfans.com for years to discuss how much we love DUSK and its characters. Here are some facts to show you just how much we love these books and talking about them!!

- OfficialDuskfans.com is the NUMBER ONE MOST VISITED DUSK SITE on the web!!
- 80 percent of our visitors are women between 20-34.
- Most of us like cookies!
- Nearly 60 percent of our visitors think that Bedward is waaaaay cooler than Chesty McRibCage.

> "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 he wants to cite the work in the rest of his paper, he uses what comes first on the Works Cited Page in his parentheses. Because he doesn't have a page number, he 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:

| Dusk |
| --- |
| Author: Sock McLemon |
| Published: 2010 |
| Publisher: Fake Publishers, New York |
| Summary: This is the first book in the series. |

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

**Assignment:**

Complete this worksheet (either by printing it out or by writing the information down on a separate sheet of paper) with two subjects that you would like to compare and at least three points that you'd like to compare or contrast these two subjects on. The easiest subjects to compare or contrast will be two subjects (like books, movies, television shows or characters, or sports figures) that you already know quite a bit about.

Then, write an idea draft – without outside sources – about your two subjects. This should be at least four paragraphs long.

Bring that draft and at least two outside sources with you to our next class meeting. If your sources are online sources, print out the web site or article you plan to use. If you want to cite a video, television episode, or movie, find a web site that lists as much information as possible about that particular show. For instance, if I were writing about *C.S.I.*, I could visit the official CBS web site and print out the page that lists critical cast information or gives information about the episode I know I want to write about.

In class, we'll work together to find places in your draft where you need to cite outside sources and we'll create Works Cited entries for each of the sources you bring in.

If you have any trouble finding sources, visit the library reference desk as soon as possible. The librarians are available to help with individual research questions during normal library hours (Monday-Thursday 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.). To check out a book, you'll need a photo ID and your L#.

You can also chat with a librarian from home by visiting the library web site at http://www.lanecc.edu/library/, or call the library at 541-463-5355.