

Comparing and Contrasting Two Characters

If you've been asked to compare and contrast two characters in order to write a paper, you might be feeling a little lost. While the information you need is in the story, it can sometimes be hard to find.

There are five steps for writing this kind of paper:



We'll go through each step with you to help make it easier for you to write your paper!

Step 1: Understanding the Assignment

The first step for any assignment is to understand what you need to do to complete the assignment. The words “compare” and “contrast” might seem scary at first, but they're just bigger words for something you already know how to do.

- To **compare** two things means to show how they are alike.
- To **contrast** two things means to show how they're different.

Let's look at a simple example together:

	
Compare	We have two apples. They both are fruit and have one leaf on their stems.
Contrast	One apple is a solid color, but the other is just an outline. The leaves and stem on each apple point in different directions.

A compare and contrast paper about two characters describes exactly what you need to do: **show how the two characters you've chosen are similar and different.**

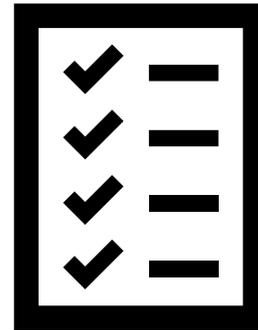
Step 2: Choosing Characters

Before you can talk about how the characters are alike and different, you need to **choose two characters** to talk about. There are often a lot of characters in a story, and choosing the ones you want to talk about can be hard. It can help to make three lists answering these questions:

- Which characters did you like most in the story?
- Which characters did you dislike most in the story?
- Which characters seemed most important? (Hint: normally there is a **protagonist**, which is the main character in the story, and often there is an **antagonist**, which is the “villain” who keeps the protagonist from getting what they want.)

Some characters might appear in more than one list, and that’s okay. It’s also fine if you can’t fill out a list for all three of these questions. What we’re doing right now is called **brainstorming**, which is a fancy word for getting ideas for your paper.

Once you’ve created your lists, look back at them and choose the list that has the characters you’re most interested in talking more about. From there, **choose two characters** to focus on in your paper.



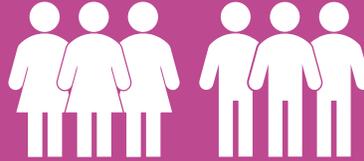
Step 3: Describing the Characters

If you’re going to talk about how the characters are alike and different, first you need to get a sense of who they both are. It helps to write down notes as you read, and as you’re making notes, you may want to write the page number next to each piece of information you write down. This will help you when it comes time to share examples in your paper. Your teacher might have given you a worksheet to do this.

If you don’t have a worksheet, then making two more lists can also work well. The chart on the next page will tell you some of the key questions you can ask as well as where you’re likely to find that information in the story.

After the chart, we’ve also shared an example of comparing Cinderella to her stepsisters (we’ll use [this version of Cinderella](#)) to help you practice finding character traits to compare and contrast:

Character Traits



What to look for	Questions to ask yourself	Best place to find it in the story
Physical descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the character look like? • What words does the writer use to show you what they look like? • How old or young is the character? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of the story (exposition) • Brief descriptions around dialogue (where people are talking) • At the climax of the story
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some things that the character does in the story? • What does this character like to do or not like to do? • What is the character's job? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief descriptions around dialogue • During the rising action (the part of the story leading up to the climax) • At the climax of the story
Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the character talk about? • Is anything unusual or interesting about how the character talks? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the dialogue (normally inside quotation marks)
Beliefs and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the character believe or not believe? • What is important to this character? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of the story (exposition) • Dialogue • During the rising action • At the climax of the story
How the other characters view this character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do other characters in the story talk about this character? • Do other characters in the story seem to like or dislike this character? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief descriptions around dialogue, often in how the other characters react to them • In what other characters say in dialogue

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Example: Character Traits for Cinderella and her Stepsisters



<p>Physical descriptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cinderella is described as “pretty.” • Even without pretty clothes, she’s very beautiful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They appear “odious” in comparison to Cinderella. • Cinderella is 100 times handsomer than they are.
<p>Actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She does all the work her stepmother gives her. • She follows all the directions her fairy godmother gives her. • She forgives her stepsisters and has them live with her in the palace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They stay in nice bedrooms and look at themselves in large looking glasses (mirrors). • They are excited to be invited to the ball and pick beautiful gowns for it. • They beg Cinderella’s forgiveness for not treating Cinderella nicely when they find out she was at the ball.
<p>Speech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She doesn’t think she is good enough to go to the ball when she talks about it with her stepsisters. • When talking to her fairy godmother, she stutters when she wishes she could go to the ball. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They talk about what they will wear to the ball. • They make fun of Cinderella. • They answer all of Cinderella’s questions about the ball.
<p>Beliefs and values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She has “unparalleled goodness and sweetness of temper” like her mother, which means she is always nice to others. • She’s patient. • She’s kind to her stepsisters at the ball when they don’t recognize her. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are like their mother, who is proud and haughty (another word for snobby or stuck-up).
<p>How the other characters view this character</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When she gets to the ball, everyone talks about how lovely she is. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are considered to be people of fashion (this means they are popular and have lots of friends), which is why they get invitations to the ball.

Step 4: Creating a Thesis Statement

A **thesis statement** is a sentence that describes the main things you're going to talk about in your paper. You can learn more about creating thesis statements in our resource on "[Thesis Statements](#)."

In a compare/contrast paper, your thesis statement will need to say that you are comparing and contrasting, and you'll need to share exactly which things you are going to compare or contrast about these characters.

Be sure to check with your teacher to see if they want you to talk about only differences or similarities or if you should talk about both. Generally, it's a good idea to discuss at least three similarities or differences between the characters in your paper, so go to your notes to find some similarities or differences you want to talk about. Once you've chosen the similarities or differences, you'll put them together in a single sentence.

Here are some examples of how you could create a compare/contrast thesis. We'll use [this version of Cinderella](#), and since her stepsisters aren't given names, we'll talk about them together as one character.

Example: Creating Compare/Contrast Thesis Statements about <i>Cinderella</i>		
		
	Template	Example
Compare (Only)	[character] and [character] are similar because of ____, ____, and ____.	Cinderella and her stepsisters are similar because they all want to go to the ball, they all try on the glass slipper, and they forgive one another at the end.
Contrast (Only)	[character] and [character] are different because ____, ____, and ____.	Cinderella and her stepsisters are different because Cinderella is beautiful, she asks for help to go to the ball, and she doesn't say unkind things to others.
Compare and Contrast	While ____ and ____ both [similarity], they are different because ____ and ____.	While Cinderella and her stepsisters all wanted to go to the ball, they are different because Cinderella had to receive help to go to the ball and she doesn't say unkind things to others.

Step 5: Creating Your Outline and Drafting the Essay

You've done a lot already, but there's just one more thing we need to do before we start writing the paper: create an **outline** so that we know what information goes where. If you created your thesis statement like we did above, you've already got a blueprint for the first step of this part.

The last sentence of your introduction paragraph will be your thesis statement. Then, each of the similarities or differences you mentioned in your thesis will become the topic of one of your body paragraphs. It's best to talk about them in the same order as you have them in your thesis.

For example, if we used the example thesis, "While Cinderella and her stepsisters all wanted to go to the ball, they are different because Cinderella had to receive help to go to the ball and she doesn't say unkind things to others," the outline could look like this:

- Introduction Paragraph
- Body Paragraph 1 – Cinderella and her stepsisters all want to go to the ball
- Body Paragraph 2 – Cinderella has to receive help to go
- Body Paragraph 3 – Cinderella doesn't say unkind things
- Conclusion Paragraph

Now that you know which order to talk about things, it's time to think about what you are going to share in each body paragraph. When we were creating the thesis statement, we wanted general evidence. Now we want to zoom in and find specific examples. To do that, you'll go back to the "Character Trait" lists you made before to find the examples you wrote down already.

Once you've finished these steps, the rest is easy! Since you've already created your outline, you just need to take the examples and write them as full sentences to create the paragraphs. Here is an example of how we could do that for the body paragraph about Cinderella and her stepsisters all wanting to go to the ball:

Cinderella and her stepsisters all want to go to the ball. When the stepsisters get the invitation to the ball, they are excited and start picking out outfits to wear (paragraph 4). They ask Cinderella for advice on their outfits, and they ask her if she wants to go the ball. She tells them first that they would laugh at her, but later, when they leave, she starts crying and tells her fairy godmother she wishes she could go too. Even though Cinderella and her stepsisters are treated differently by her stepmother, all the sisters want a chance to go to the ball and meet the prince.

Once you've drafted paragraphs for each of your differences or similarities, and you've added in an introduction and conclusion paragraph, you are done with your first draft. You did it!