

Compare and Contrast: Lesson One (June 17-22)

Here's what you'll be doing in this lesson:

- Exploring the concept of compare-and-contrast thinking
- Studying a lengthy sentence by H. G. Wells
- Persuading someone with your focused compare-and-contrast sentence
- Appreciating the married state

You can check each box after you've finished the corresponding section, either in the list above or in each section below, if you like.

Explore the concept of compare-and-contrast thinking.

You already know how to compare and contrast—in your head, that is. You read a book. Then you watch the movie. Automatically you begin to compare the two versions of the same story. How are the two similar? Where are they different? How is the movie better or worse than the book? Which do you like better? You've been comparing and contrasting for years.



The skill of comparing is finding the similarities. The skill of contrasting is finding the differences.

But the compare-and-contrast tool isn't just for school. Movie critics use it when they compare two recent movies that feature the same actor or when they contrast one director's work with another's. Remakes are always compared with their originals, and so are sequels.

Historians naturally compare leaders with each other. When discussing a war, historians will review the strengths and weaknesses of two generals or will show the differing effects of two battles. Comparing and contrasting gives meaning to an event.

Comparing and contrasting is already one of your life skills. Are you thinking about your future—career, college, marriage, or wait and see? This

involves examining the advantages and disadvantages of all your choices and the similarities and differences between them (College A has smaller class sizes, College B allows freshmen to have cars on campus, and College C has a more interesting male/female ratio). When you weigh your options, you are comparing and contrasting.

Someday, you may be sitting in a meeting when the boss tells you to get the information on mobile-device plans for company-wide use. You will call mobile-device companies; collect data on rates, minutes, features, contracts, and so forth; and put the information on a handy chart or in a report for your boss to examine. You will have done the work of comparing and contrasting so the boss can make an informed decision.

Now It's Your Turn

You've been comparing and contrasting things for years. Here are few decisions, large and small, you might have weighed recently:

- ✓ What to wear to the special event
- ✓ Which fast food restaurant to go to
- ✓ What to eat once you got there
- ✓ Which school course to take
- ✓ Which route to take while driving
- ✓ Which article of clothing to buy
- ✓ Which organization to send a donation to
- ✓ Which summer activity to participate in

Underline one of the decisions above that you've made recently. If none of these decisions was on your radar, choose a recent or large decision you've made in which there were at least two options, and write it in the space below:

Next, fill in the boxes with the features, qualities, colors, calories, and so forth that you compared before you made your decision. For instance, when deciding on a tent for your next hiking trip, was one tent lightweight for backpacking while another tent was easier to assemble?

Choice #1

Choice #2



What tipped the scales for you? What made you choose one thing over the other? Write it below:

Unless you based your choice on a gut reaction, totally ignoring your brain, you used the compare-and-contrast skill when you made your decision.

□ Study a lengthy sentence by H. G. Wells.

You may know H. G. Wells as the writer of *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*. He's also the author of *Select Conversations with an Uncle*, published in 1895, in which a young-adult nephew and his 50-ish uncle schmooze and discuss life issues.

In that work, when the uncle announces his engagement, the young nephew reacts with the following sentence, contrasting the seemingly happy state of bachelorhood with the sordid and depressing state of marriage. Here are some words you'll run into in this sentence: "Rate-payer" means taxpayer; "pew tenant" means renting a pew at the local church and attending there; "paterfamilias" means the male head of a family.

It seemed so dreadful to me that the cheerful, talkative man beside me, my own father's little brother, a traveler in distant countries, and a most innocent man, and with all the inveterate habits of thirty years' honorable bachelorhood and all the mellowness of life upon him, should, without consulting me, have taken the first irrevocable step toward becoming a rate-payer, a pew tenant, paterfamilias, a fighter with schoolmasters, and the serf of a butler, that I scarcely knew what to say adequate to the occasion.

Now It's Your Turn

Use the paragraph by Wells to fill in the lists below. The first ones are done:

Write the positive images here

Little brother (connotes vulnerability)

Write the negative images here

irrevocable (connotes negative idea of *forever*)

Doesn't Wells make it seem unfair that such a cheerfully innocent man should be tied down to such a nasty life? It's easy to see that he boosts the idea of bachelorhood with wonderful words and images, while he loads down the idea of marriage with terribly confining images.

❑ Persuade someone with your focused compare-and-contrast sentence.

❑ Appreciate the married state.

Now It's Your Turn

You are going to write a sentence to express the exact opposite of H. G. Wells' opinions on bachelorhood and marriage. In other words, you are going to be *against* choosing to stay single and *for* marriage. In the boxes below, write negative words and images for choosing to stay single and positive words and images for marriage. Make them super slanted, just like H. G. Wells does:

[Note: Yes, I know there are legitimate reasons to choose to remain single. In this exercise, though, you are writing *against* that idea and *for* the state of marriage.]

Choosing to stay single: **negative** words and images

Marriage: **positive** words and images

Yellow represents the part of the sentence concerned with bachelorhood; pink represents the marriage section:

It seemed so dreadful to me that the cheerful, talkative man beside me, my own father's little brother, a traveler in distant countries, and a most innocent man, and with all the inveterate habits of thirty years' honorable bachelorhood and all the mellowness of life upon him, should, without consulting me, have taken the first irrevocable step toward becoming a rate-payer, a pew tenant, paterfamilias, a fighter with schoolmasters, and the serf of a butler, that I scarcely knew what to say adequate to the occasion.

Wells puts marriage last because his negative feelings for marriage are stronger than his positive feelings for bachelorhood. In other words, in a compare-and-contrast statement, you will put the most important thing last. Putting it last emphasizes it in the minds of the readers.

Your Turn Again

Write your own lengthy sentence and promote a positive attitude toward marriage in your sentence. Use the negative words and images you compiled for choosing to stay single and the positive words and images you compiled for choosing to be married. You are writing to persuade a reader to see your point.

After you have written your lengthy sentence, run a highlighter over the staying-single part and a highlighter of another color over the getting-married issue. You can underline your sections with two different colors of pens instead, if you wish. Then ask yourself these questions:

- Is one issue in its own section of my sentence?
- Is the other issue in a separate section of my sentence?
- Did I use negatively loaded words and images for the issue of choosing to stay single?
- Did I use positively loaded words and images for the issue of marrying?
- Am I trying to persuade a reader to agree with my sentence?

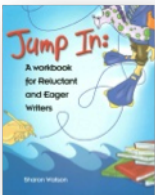
Let's hope all the answers are "Yes!"

This paragraph is for high school students: Decide which issue—choosing to stay single or becoming married—has more weight in your mind. In other words, do you want to make a stronger statement *against* staying single or a stronger statement *for* getting married? Yes, you are writing about both issues in your sentence, but whichever issue is stronger in your mind, address it last.

Did I end my lengthy sentence with the issue I feel most strongly about?

Come back next week when you'll tackle a compare-and-contrast paragraph!

Some of the material for this lesson is from Sharon Watson's *The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School*. If you enjoyed this lesson but would like a full writing curriculum for your middle school or high school students, consider these options from Writing with Sharon Watson:



*Jump In: A Workbook for
Reluctant and Eager Writers*
Middle School
Nonfiction and Fiction



*The Power in Your Hands:
Writing Nonfiction in High
School*



Writing Fiction [in High School]

Visit www.WritingWithSharonWatson.com for more information. You'll find weekly writing prompts during the school year there as well.