

# Recipe for Delicious Comparison

In Literature Paper 1 Section A

## STEP 1

Read the **question** and glance at both titles to get a sense of what to compare.

- The poetry question is sometimes generic, asking for 'the way your responses are shaped'. If the pairing is not very obvious, the question may prompt you with a central concern (e.g. 'present a hopeful love', 'portrayal of endurance').
- In any case, glossing over the titles should help you piece together the central concern. Keep in mind that both poems will be **similar** (e.g. both are about childhood) **but not the same** (e.g. A sees childhood as more innocent than B's portrayal).

## STEP 2

Read both poems quickly for **content**, picking out important lines and ideas.

- Reading for comprehension does not require you to 'figure out the scenario' at all (e.g. abortion, drowning). Instead, try to identify the ideas or topics expressed (e.g. birth, helplessness in death).
- In most poems, there should be distinct lines that express these ideas (e.g. 'Death be not proud'). Find and hold onto them.

## STEP 3

Read the more accessible poem for **style**, picking out key words and images first.

- Once you feel confident about the poem's overall meaning, consider how the poem's perspective (who is the speaker?) and title contributes to this meaning. Avoid jumping straight at rhyme, rhyme scheme and structure.
- Next, consider word choice and its effects. Language and figurative language (imagery, motifs, metaphors, similes) are integral to the speaker's tone / the poem's mood and by extension, what the poem is saying about the central concern.
- Only after you grasp how the poet's style create meaning should you move on to stylistic features that enhance meaning. Consider how form - rhythm, rhyme, structure, sound - enhances the meaning of the poem.

## STEP 4

Read the less accessible poem **in terms of the first poem's style and meaning**.

- Confused by this instruction, dear student? Many forget that you are supposed to compare and contrast both poems against each other. It simply is not enough to look at form in A and B, or imagery in A and B. How do they compare in terms of ideas (meaning) and effects (style)? You have limited time, so don't waste it...
- Analyse similar features in the other poem and use your previous analysis as a trigger. (e.g. 'The tone in Poem B is *less bitter* or *more hopeful* than Poem A', 'Unlike A's cynical view, B celebrates childbirth as an opportunity.') This would mean that you are actively seeking points of comparison the moment you close-read this 'less accessible poem', effectively making it more accessible! Even if you are not quite sure what the poem means, a comparison will help you bring out its 'meaning'.

## STEP 5

Organise your points of comparison by style or meaning. Write the essay!

- You may wish to (i) compare similar features like tone, imagery, perspective and find differences in effect and meaning or (ii) compare similar ideas like love and death and find differences in effect and meaning.
- While it is easier to do so, it is not mandatory to compare imagery in A with imagery in B. It is also not necessary to pile everything into a paragraph. For instance, you can analyse tone across two paragraphs (especially if there is a tonal shift).