Research & Analysis / Source Summaries

Compare multiple sources on the same topic across methodology, findings, limitations, and author bias.
Difficulty: Intermediate
Model: GPT-4 / Claude / Gemini
Use Case: Literature Reviews, Research Synthesis, Vendor Selection
Updated: May 2026
Why This Prompt Exists
Reading one source gives you one perspective. Reading five gives you confusion — unless you compare them systematically.

You get:

- noticing contradictions but not explaining them
- no way to decide which source to trust
- literature reviews that list sources instead of synthesizing
- meetings where people cite different sources and talk past each other
- decisions based on the most recent source read, not the best evidence

But comparison reveals truth:

- consensus: where most sources agree (high confidence)
- conflict: where sources disagree (needs investigation)
- methodology differences: why findings differ
- bias patterns: which sources consistently favor certain conclusions
- gaps: what no source has studied

Without comparison, you have opinions, not evidence.

This prompt creates a structured comparison matrix across multiple sources.

The Prompt

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Assume the role of a research synthesizer who compares multiple
sources.

Your task is to create a comparison matrix across sources on the same
topic.

Generate:

1. COMPARISON MATRIX (table format)

| Dimension | Source 1 | Source 2 | Source 3 |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Authors/Year | | | |
| Methodology | | | |
| Sample/Population | | | |
| Key Finding | | | |
| Effect Size | | | |
| Limitations | | | |
| Funding/Sponsor | | | |

2. CONSENSUS AREAS
   - What do all (or most) sources agree on?
   - Confidence level (High/Medium/Low)

3. CONFLICT AREAS
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   - Where do sources disagree?
   - Potential reasons for disagreement (methods? samples? bias?)

4. TRUST ASSESSMENT (per source)
   - Source 1: Highly trustworthy / Trust with caveats / Low trust
   - Rationale

5. RECOMMENDED CITATION
   - Which source(s) to cite for which claim

INPUTS:

Source 1 (summary or full text):
[PASTE]

Source 2:
[PASTE]

Source 3:
[PASTE]

Topic/question:
[E.G., "Does remote work reduce productivity?"]

Your decision context:
[E.G., "Deciding our return-to-office policy"]

RULES:
- Include all sources even if they disagree strongly

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- Flag when sources measure the same thing differently
- Note effect sizes, not just direction (who found a bigger effect?)
- Distinguish between peer-reviewed and gray literature
- Be explicit about your own bias in interpreting the comparison
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How To Use It

- Use this for any decision that depends on multiple sources of evidence.
- Include sources that disagree with your hypothesis — that's where learning happens.
- Pay attention to methodology differences — they often explain apparent contradictions.
- Look for consensus areas first — these are your high-confidence claims.
- Share the matrix with stakeholders before decisions — it builds trust in your process.

Example Input

Topic/question:
"Does daily standup meeting improve team productivity?"

Source 1:
"Agile study 2023: Survey of 500 dev teams, self-reported productivity. 70% said standups help. No objective metrics."

Source 2:
"Academic study 2024: Time-tracking of 50 teams. Standups correlate with 5% productivity increase ($p<.05$) but also 8% time spent in meetings." **Source 3:**
"Basecamp research: Argues standups are status updates, not collaboration. Recommends async check-ins instead. No data, just opinion."

Why It Works
Most literature reviews are annotated bibliographies — "Source A found X, Source B found Y."

This framework improves outcomes by forcing:

- structured comparison (apples to apples across dimensions)
- consensus identification (where the field agrees)
- conflict explanation (why sources disagree)
- trust assessment (not all sources are equal)
- citation guidance (which source for which claim)

Great source comparison doesn't just list what each says — it tells you what to believe.

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