Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing

This handout is intended to help you become more comfortable with the uses of and distinctions among quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. This handout compares and contrasts the three terms, gives some pointers, and includes a short excerpt that you can use to practice these skills.

#### What are the differences among quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing?

These three ways of incorporating other writers' work into your own writing differ according to the closeness of your writing to the source writing.

**Quotations** must be identical to the original, using a narrow segment of the source. They must match the source document word for word and must be attributed to the original author.

**Paraphrasing** involves putting a passage from source material into your own words. A paraphrase must also be attributed to the original source. Paraphrased material is usually shorter than the original passage, taking a somewhat broader segment of the source and condensing it slightly.

**Summarizing** involves putting the main idea(s) into your own words, including only the main point(s). Once again, it is necessary to attribute summarized ideas to the original source. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material.

#### Why use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries?

Quotations, paraphrases, and summaries serve many purposes. You might use them to:

* Provide support for claims or add credibility to your writing
* Refer to work that leads up to the work you are now doing
* Give examples of several points of view on a subject
* Call attention to a position that you wish to agree or disagree with
* Highlight a particularly striking phrase, sentence, or passage by quoting the original
* Distance yourself from the original by quoting it in order to cue readers that the words are not your own
* Expand the breadth or depth of your writing

Writers frequently intertwine summaries, paraphrases, and quotations. As part of a summary of an article, a chapter, or a book, a writer might include paraphrases of various key points blended with quotations of striking or suggestive phrases as in the following example:

In his famous and influential work The Interpretation of Dreams, Sigmund Freud argues that dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious" (page #), expressing in coded imagery the dreamer's unfulfilled wishes through a process known as the "dream-work" (page #). According to Freud, actual but unacceptable desires are censored internally and subjected to coding through layers of condensation and displacement before emerging in a kind of rebus puzzle in the dream itself (page #).

#### How to use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries

It might be helpful to follow these steps:

* Read the entire text, noting the key points and main ideas.
* Summarize in your own words what the single main idea of the essay is.
* Paraphrase important supporting points that come up in the essay.
* Consider any words, phrases, or brief passages that you believe should be quoted directly.

There are several ways to integrate quotations into your text. Often, a short quotation works well when integrated into a sentence. Longer quotations can stand alone. Remember that quoting should be done only sparingly; be sure that you have a good reason to include a direct quotation when you decide to do so. You'll find guidelines for citing sources and punctuating citations at our documentation guide pages.

## Paraphrase: Write It in Your Own Words

Paraphrasing is one way to use a text in your own writing without directly quoting source material. Anytime you are taking information from a source that is not your own, you need to specify where you got that information.

PARTNER CONTENT

### Check for plagiarism & grammar mistakes

#### Wipe out writing errors that can affect your grade

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#### A paraphrase is...

* Your own rendition of essential information and ideas expressed by someone else, presented in a new form.
* One legitimate way (when accompanied by accurate documentation) to borrow from a source.
* A more detailed restatement than a summary, which focuses concisely on a single main idea.

#### Paraphrasing is a valuable skill because...

* It is better than quoting information from an undistinguished passage.
* It helps you control the temptation to quote too much.
* The mental process required for successful paraphrasing helps you to grasp the full meaning of the original.

#### 6 Steps to Effective Paraphrasing

1. Reread the original passage until you understand its full meaning.
2. Set the original aside, and write your paraphrase on a note card.
3. Jot down a few words below your paraphrase to remind you later how you envision using this material. At the top of the note card, write a key word or phrase to indicate the subject of your paraphrase.
4. Check your rendition with the original to make sure that your version accurately expresses all the essential information in a new form.
5. Use quotation marks to identify any unique term or phraseology you have borrowed exactly from the source.
6. Record the source (including the page) on your note card so that you can credit it easily if you decide to incorporate the material into your paper.

### **Some examples to compare**

Note that the examples in this section use MLA style for in-text citation.

#### The original passage:

Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final [research] paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes. Lester, James D. Writing Research Papers. 2nd ed., 1976, pp. 46-47.

#### A legitimate paraphrase:

In research papers, students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester 46-47).

#### An acceptable summary:

Students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper (Lester 46-47).

#### A plagiarized version:

Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes.

A note about plagiarism: This example has been classed as plagiarism, in part, because of its failure to deploy any citation. Plagiarism is a serious offense in the academic world. However, we acknowledge that plagiarism is a difficult term to define; that its definition may be contextually sensitive; and that not all instances of plagiarism are created equal—that is, there are varying “degrees of egregiousness” for different cases of plagiarism.

# QUOTING AND PARAPHRASING

[Download this Handout PDF](https://writing.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/535/2018/07/Acknowledging_Sources.pdf)

College writing often involves integrating information from published sources into your own writing in order to add credibility and authority–this process is essential to research and the production of new knowledge.

However, when building on the work of others, you need to be careful not to **plagiarize**: “to steal and pass off (the ideas and words of another) as one’s own” or to “present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.”1 The University of Wisconsin–Madison takes this act of “intellectual burglary” very seriously and considers it to be a breach of [academic integrity](https://students.wisc.edu/student-conduct/academic-integrity/). Penalties are severe.

These materials will help you avoid plagiarism by teaching you how to properly integrate information from published sources into your own writing.

1. Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1993), 888.

## HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

When using sources in your papers, you can avoid plagiarism by knowing what must be documented.

### SPECIFIC WORDS AND PHRASES

If you use an author’s specific word or words, you must place those words within quotation marks **and** you must credit the source.

### INFORMATION AND IDEAS

Even if you use your own words, if you obtained the information or ideas you are presenting from a source, you must document the source.

**Information**: If a piece of information isn’t common knowledge (see below), you need to provide a source.

**Ideas**: An author’s ideas may include not only points made and conclusions drawn, but, for instance, a specific method or theory, the arrangement of material, or a list of steps in a process or characteristics of a medical condition. If a source provided any of these, you need to acknowledge the source.

### COMMON KNOWLEDGE?

You do not need to cite a source for material considered common knowledge:

**General common knowledge** is factual information considered to be in the public domain, such as birth and death dates of well-known figures, and generally accepted dates of military, political, literary, and other historical events. In general, factual information contained in multiple standard reference works can usually be considered to be in the public domain.

**Field-specific common knowledge** is “common” only within a particular field or specialty. It may include facts, theories, or methods that are familiar to readers within that discipline. For instance, you may not need to cite a reference to Piaget’s developmental stages in a paper for an education class or give a source for your description of a commonly used method in a biology report—but you must be sure that this information is so widely known within that field that it will be shared by your readers.

If in doubt, be cautious and cite the source. **And in the case of both general and field-specific common knowledge, if you use the exact words of the reference source, you must use quotation marks and credit the source.**

## PARAPHRASING VS. QUOTING — EXPLANATION

### SHOULD I PARAPHRASE OR QUOTE?

**In general,** use direct quotations only if you have a good reason. Most of your paper should be in your own words. Also, it’s often conventional to quote more extensively from sources when you’re writing a humanities paper, and to summarize from sources when you’re writing in the social or natural sciences–but there are always exceptions.

In a **literary analysis paper**, for example, you”ll want to quote from the literary text rather than summarize, because part of your task in this kind of paper is to analyze the specific words and phrases an author uses.

In **research papers**, you should **quote** from a source

* to show that an authority supports your point
* to present a position or argument to critique or comment on
* to include especially moving or historically significant language
* to present a particularly well-stated passage whose meaning would be lost or changed if paraphrased or summarized

You should **summarize or paraphrase** when

* what you want from the source is the **idea** expressed, and **not the specific language** used to express it
* you can express in fewer words what the key point of a source is

## HOW TO PARAPHRASE A SOURCE

### GENERAL ADVICE

* When reading a passage, try first to understand it as a whole, rather than pausing to write down specific ideas or phrases.
* Be selective. Unless your assignment is to do a formal or “literal” paraphrase, you usually don?t need to paraphrase an entire passage; instead, choose and summarize the material that helps you make a point in your paper.
* Think of what “your own words” would be if you were telling someone who’s unfamiliar with your subject (your mother, your brother, a friend) what the original source said.
* Remember that you can use direct quotations of phrases from the original within your paraphrase, and that you don’t need to change or put quotation marks around shared language.

### METHODS OF PARAPHRASING

* **Look away from the source then write.**  
  Read the text you want to paraphrase several times until you feel that you understand it and can use your own words to restate it to someone else. Then, look away from the original and rewrite the text in your own words.
* **Take notes.**  
  Take abbreviated notes; set the notes aside; then paraphrase from the notes a day or so later, or when you draft.

If you find that you can’t do A or B, this may mean that you don’t understand the passage completely or that you need to use a more structured process until you have more experience in paraphrasing.

The method below is not only a way to create a paraphrase but also a way to understand a difficult text.

### PARAPHRASING DIFFICULT TEXTS

Consider the following passage from Love and Toil (a book on motherhood in London from 1870 to 1918), in which the author, Ellen Ross, puts forth one of her major arguments:

* Love and Toil maintains that family survival was the mother’s main charge among the large majority of London?s population who were poor or working class; the emotional and intellectual nurture of her child or children and even their actual comfort were forced into the background. To mother was to work for and organize household subsistence. (p. 9)
* **Change the structure**  
  Begin by starting at a different place in the passage and/or sentence(s), basing your choice on the focus of your paper. This will lead naturally to some changes in wording. Some places you might start in the passage above are “The mother’s main charge,” “Among the . . . poor or working class,” “Working for and organizing household subsistence,” or “The emotional and intellectual nurture.” Or you could begin with one of the people the passage is about: “Mothers,” “A mother,” “Children,” “A child.” Focusing on specific people rather than abstractions will make your paraphrase more readable.At this stage, you might also break up long sentences, combine short ones, expand phrases for clarity, or shorten them for conciseness, or you might do this in an additional step. In this process, you’ll naturally eliminate some words and change others.Here’s one of the many ways you might get started with a paraphrase of the passage above by changing its structure. In this case, the focus of the paper is the effect of economic status on children at the turn of the century, so the writer begins with children:

*Children of the poor at the turn of the century received little if any emotional or intellectual nurturing from their mothers, whose main charge was family survival. Working for and organizing household subsistence were what defined mothering. Next to this, even the children’s basic comfort was forced into the background (Ross, 1995).*

Now you’ve succeeded in changing the structure, but the passage still contains many direct quotations, so you need to go on to the second step.

* **Change the words**  
  Use synonyms or a phrase that expresses the same meaning. Leave shared language unchanged.It’s important to start by changing the structure, not the words, but you might find that as you change the words, you see ways to change the structure further. The final paraphrase might look like this:

*According to Ross (1993), poor children at the turn of the century received little mothering in our sense of the term. Mothering was defined by economic status, and among the poor, a mother’s foremost responsibility was not to stimulate her children’s minds or foster their emotional growth but to provide food and shelter to meet the basic requirements for physical survival. Given the magnitude of this task, children were deprived of even the “actual comfort” (p. 9) we expect mothers to provide today.*

You may need to go through this process several times to create a satisfactory paraphrase.

## SUCCESSFUL VS. UNSUCCESSFUL PARAPHRASES

Paraphrasing is often defined as putting a passage from an author into “your own words.” But what are your own words? How different must your paraphrase be from the original?

The paragraphs below provide an example by showing a passage as it appears in the source, two paraphrases that follow the source too closely, and a legitimate paraphrase.

The student’s intention was to incorporate the material in the original passage into a section of a paper on the concept of “experts” that compared the functions of experts and nonexperts in several professions.

### THE PASSAGE AS IT APPEARS IN THE SOURCE

*Critical care nurses function in a hierarchy of roles. In this open heart surgery unit, the nurse manager hires and fires the nursing personnel. The nurse manager does not directly care for patients but follows the progress of unusual or long-term patients. On each shift a nurse assumes the role of resource nurse. This person oversees the hour-by-hour functioning of the unit as a whole, such as considering expected admissions and discharges of patients, ascertaining that beds are available for patients in the operating room, and covering sick calls. Resource nurses also take a patient assignment. They are the most experienced of all the staff nurses. The nurse clinician has a separate job description and provides for quality of care by orienting new staff, developing unit policies, and providing direct support where needed, such as assisting in emergency situations. The clinical nurse specialist in this unit is mostly involved with formal teaching in orienting new staff. The nurse manager, nurse clinician, and clinical nurse specialist are the designated experts. They do not take patient assignments. The resource nurse is seen as both a caregiver and a resource to other caregivers. . . . Staff nurses have a hierarchy of seniority. . . . Staff nurses are assigned to patients to provide all their nursing care. (Chase, 1995, p. 156)*

### WORD-FOR-WORD PLAGIARISM

*Critical care nurses have a hierarchy of roles. The nurse manager hires and fires nurses. S/he does not directly care for patients but does follow unusual or long-term cases. On each shift a resource nurse attends to the functioning of the unit as a whole, such as making sure beds are available in the operating room, and also has a patient assignment. The nurse clinician orients new staff, develops policies, and provides support where needed. The clinical nurse specialist also orients new staff, mostly by formal teaching. The nurse manager, nurse clinician, and clinical nurse specialist, as the designated experts, do not take patient assignments. The resource nurse is not only a caregiver but a resource to the other caregivers. Within the staff nurses there is also a hierarchy of seniority. Their job is to give assigned patients all their nursing care.*

### WHY THIS IS PLAGIARISM

Notice that the writer has not only “borrowed” Chase’s material (the results of her research) with no acknowledgment, but has also largely maintained the author’s method of expression and sentence structure. The phrases in red are directly copied from the source or changed only slightly in form.

Even if the student-writer had acknowledged Chase as the source of the content, the language of the passage would be considered plagiarized because no quotation marks indicate the phrases that come directly from Chase. And if quotation marks did appear around all these phrases, this paragraph would be so cluttered that it would be unreadable.

### A PATCHWORK PARAPHRASE

*Chase (1995) describes how nurses in a critical care unit function in a hierarchy that places designated experts at the top and the least senior staff nurses at the bottom. The experts — the nurse manager, nurse clinician, and clinical nurse specialist — are not involved directly in patient care. The staff nurses, in contrast, are assigned to patients and provide all their nursing care. Within the staff nurses is a hierarchy of seniority in which the most senior can become resource nurses: they are assigned a patient but also serve as a resource to other caregivers. The experts have administrative and teaching tasks such as selecting and orienting new staff, developing unit policies, and giving hands-on support where needed.*

### WHY THIS IS PLAGIARISM

This paraphrase is a patchwork composed of pieces in the original author’s language (in red) and pieces in the student-writer’s words, all rearranged into a new pattern, but with none of the borrowed pieces in quotation marks. Thus, even though the writer acknowledges the source of the material, the underlined phrases are falsely presented as the student’s own.

### A LEGITIMATE PARAPHRASE

*In her study of the roles of nurses in a critical care unit, Chase (1995) also found a hierarchy that distinguished the roles of experts and others. Just as the educational experts described above do not directly teach students, the experts in this unit do not directly attend to patients. That is the role of the staff nurses, who, like teachers, have their own “hierarchy of seniority” (p. 156). The roles of the experts include employing unit nurses and overseeing the care of special patients (nurse manager), teaching and otherwise integrating new personnel into the unit (clinical nurse specialist and nurse clinician), and policy-making (nurse clinician). In an intermediate position in the hierarchy is the resource nurse, a staff nurse with more experience than the others, who assumes direct care of patients as the other staff nurses do, but also takes on tasks to ensure the smooth operation of the entire facility.*

### WHY THIS IS A GOOD PARAPHRASE

The writer has documented Chase’s material and specific language (by direct reference to the author and by quotation marks around language taken directly from the source). Notice too that the writer has modified Chase’s language and structure and has added material to fit the new context and purpose — to present the distinctive functions of experts and nonexperts in several professions.

### SHARED LANGUAGE

Perhaps you’ve noticed that a number of phrases from the original passage appear in the legitimate paraphrase: critical care, staff nurses, nurse manager, clinical nurse specialist, nurse clinician, resource nurse.

If all these phrases were in red, the paraphrase would look much like the “patchwork” example. The difference is that the phrases in the legitimate paraphrase are all precise, economical, and conventional designations that are part of the shared language within the nursing discipline (in the too-close paraphrases, they’re red only when used within a longer borrowed phrase).

In every discipline and in certain genres (such as the empirical research report), some phrases are so specialized or conventional that you can’t paraphrase them except by wordy and awkward circumlocutions that would be less familiar (and thus less readable) to the audience.

When you repeat such phrases, you’re not stealing the unique phrasing of an individual writer but using a common vocabulary shared by a community of scholars.

#### SOME EXAMPLES OF SHARED LANGUAGE YOU DON’T NEED TO PUT IN QUOTATION MARKS

* **Conventional designations:** e.g., physician’s assistant, chronic low-back pain
* **Preferred bias-free language:** e.g., persons with disabilities
* **Technical terms and phrases of a discipline or genre**: e.g., reduplication, cognitive domain, material culture, sexual harassment

**References**

*Chase, S. K. (1995). The social context of critical care clinical judgment. Heart and Lung, 24, 154-162.*

## HOW TO QUOTE A SOURCE

### INTRODUCING A QUOTATION

One of your jobs as a writer is to guide your reader through your text. Don’t simply drop quotations into your paper and leave it to the reader to make connections.

Integrating a quotation into your text usually involves two elements:

* A **signal** that a quotation is coming–generally the author’s name and/or a reference to the work
* An **assertion** that indicates the relationship of the quotation to your text

Often both the signal and the assertion appear in a single introductory statement, as in the example below. Notice how a transitional phrase also serves to connect the quotation smoothly to the introductory statement.

*Ross (1993), in her study of poor and working-class mothers in London from 1870-1918 [signal], makes it clear that economic status to a large extent determined the meaning of motherhood [assertion]. Among this population [connection], “To mother was to work for and organize household subsistence” (p. 9).*

The signal can also come after the assertion, again with a connecting word or phrase:

*Illness was rarely a routine matter in the nineteenth century [assertion]. As [connection] Ross observes [signal], “Maternal thinking about children’s health revolved around the possibility of a child’s maiming or death” (p. 166).*

### FORMATTING QUOTATIONS

#### SHORT DIRECT PROSE

Incorporate short direct prose quotations into the text of your paper and enclose them in double quotation marks:

*According to Jonathan Clarke, “Professional diplomats often say that trying to think diplomatically about foreign policy is a waste of time.”*

#### LONGER PROSE QUOTATIONS

Begin longer quotations (for instance, in the APA system, 40 words or more) on a new line and indent the entire quotation (i.e., put in block form), with no quotation marks at beginning or end, as in the quoted passage from our Successful vs. Unsucessful Paraphrases page.

Rules about the minimum length of block quotations, how many spaces to indent, and whether to single- or double-space extended quotations vary with different documentation systems; check the guidelines for the system you’re using.

#### QUOTATION OF UP TO 3 LINES OF POETRY

Quotations of up to 3 lines of poetry should be integrated into your sentence. For example:

*In Julius Caesar, Antony begins his famous speech with “Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears; / I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him” (III.ii.75-76).*

Notice that a slash (/) with a space on either side is used to separate lines.

#### QUOTATION OF MORE THAN 3 LINES OF POETRY

More than 3 lines of poetry should be indented. As with any extended (indented) quotation, do not use quotation marks unless you need to indicate a quotation within your quotation.

### PUNCTUATING WITH QUOTATION MARKS

#### PARENTHETICAL CITATIONS

With short quotations, place citations outside of closing quotation marks, followed by sentence punctuation (period, question mark, comma, semi-colon, colon):

*Menand (2002) characterizes language as “a social weapon” (p. 115).*

With block quotations, check the guidelines for the documentation system you are using.

#### COMMAS AND PERIODS

Place inside closing quotation marks when no parenthetical citation follows:

*Hertzberg (2002) notes that “treating the Constitution as imperfect is not new,” but because of Dahl’s credentials, his “apostasy merits attention” (p. 85).*

#### SEMICOLONS AND COLONS

Place outside of closing quotation marks (or after a parenthetical citation).

#### QUESTION MARKS AND EXCLAMATION POINTS

Place inside closing quotation marks if the quotation is a question/exclamation:

*Menand (2001) acknowledges that H. W. Fowler’s Modern English Usage is “a classic of the language,” but he asks, “Is it a dead classic?” (p. 114).*

[Note that a period still follows the closing parenthesis.]

Place outside of closing quotation marks if the entire sentence containing the quotation is a question or exclamation:

*How many students actually read the guide to find out what is meant by “academic misconduct”?*

#### QUOTATION WITHIN A QUOTATION

Use single quotation marks for the embedded quotation:

*According to Hertzberg (2002), Dahl gives the U. S. Constitution “bad marks in ‘democratic fairness’ and ‘encouraging consensus'” (p. 90).*

[The phrases “democratic fairness” and “encouraging consensus” are already in quotation marks in Dahl’s sentence.]

### INDICATING CHANGES IN QUOTATIONS

#### QUOTING ONLY A PORTION OF THE WHOLE

Use ellipsis points (. . .) to indicate an omission within a quotation–but not at the beginning or end unless it’s not obvious that you’re quoting only a portion of the whole.

#### ADDING CLARIFICATION, COMMENT, OR CORRECTION

Within quotations, use square brackets [ ] (not parentheses) to add your own clarification, comment, or correction.

Use [sic] (meaning “so” or “thus”) to indicate that a mistake is in the source you’re quoting and is not your own.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### INFORMATION ON SUMMARIZING AND PARAPHRASING SOURCES

*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (4th ed.). (2000). Retrieved January 7, 2002, from http://www.bartleby.com/61/*

*Bazerman, C. (1995). The informed writer: Using sources in the disciplines (5th ed). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.*

*Leki, I. (1995). Academic writing: Exploring processes and strategies (2nd ed.) New York: St. Martin?s Press, pp. 185-211.*

Leki describes the basic method presented in C, pp. 4-5.

*Spatt, B. (1999). Writing from sources (5th ed.) New York: St. Martin?s Press, pp. 98-119; 364-371.*

### INFORMATION ABOUT SPECIFIC DOCUMENTATION SYSTEMS

The Writing Center has handouts explaining how to use many of the standard documentation systems. You may look at our general Web page on Documentation Systems, or you may check out any of the following specific Web pages.

If you’re not sure which documentation system to use, ask the course instructor who assigned your paper.

* American Psychological Assoicaion (APA)
* Modern Language Association (MLA)
* Chicago/Turabian (A Footnote or Endnote System)
* American Political Science Association (APSA)
* Council of Science Editors (CBE)
* Numbered References

You may also consult the following guides:

* American Medical Association, Manual for Authors and Editors
* Council of Science Editors, CBE style Manual
* The Chicago Manual of Style
* MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers
* Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association