Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting

Inquire: Quoting, Paraphrasing, Summarizing - Oh My!

Overview

Quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing are some of the most important skills to have when writing an argumentative essay. No matter what you’re arguing for, you’ll need support to help you prove your point. Such support most often comes in the form of summaries, quotes, or paraphrases. We sometimes do this without even thinking! For example, we often share stories about humorous or dramatic things that happened to us throughout the day; however, there’s a little more to it when you’re writing an essay.

Big Question: How can I use quotations and paraphrases in my writing?

Watch: “That’s What She Said”

If you’re a fan of the hit TV series — and now cult classic — *The Office*, you’re probably familiar with Michael Scott’s favorite punchline: “That’s what she said!” Scott would utter this phrase any time any character said something which could be perceived as having even the slightest amount of innuendo. After saying his catchphrase, he would usually turn and smile goofily into the nearest camera. Fans of the show quickly adopted the phrase, and it became so ubiquitous that no one could say, “that’s what she said,” in seriousness without bringing on a fit of laughter.

While this is a silly example, it goes to show how easy putting words into another person’s mouth can be. Simply by saying, “that’s what she said,” Scott was able to attribute a phrase to some unknown speaker. This same kind of power exists when we quote, paraphrase, or summarize in our essays. Our readers trust that we will responsibly quote or paraphrase material. While we have the power, as writers, to represent material in whatever way we’d like, we have a responsibility to represent all quoted and paraphrased material correctly. That process begins by quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing at the appropriate times. Each form of attribution has a unique purpose.

A quotation is made up of exact words from a source, which you must be careful to let your reader know were not originally your words. To indicate your reliance on exact words from a source, either place the borrowed words between quotation marks or — if the quotation is 40 words or more — use indentation to create a block quotation.

A paraphrase preserves information from a source but does not preserve its exact wording. Paraphrase when information from a source can help you explain or illustrate a point you are making, but the exact wording of the source is not crucial.
A summary is when you identify the most important ideas and concepts and restate the text (or other media) in your own words. Summary is often reserved for times when you need to condense large portions of material into only a few words or sentences.

Each of these tools is necessary for writing a well-supported argumentative essay, but it’s helpful to know when to use each form. Are you ready to learn more about including sources in your essay?

Read: Quoting and Paraphrasing

Overview

Quoting and paraphrasing are part of our everyday lives. We do both without thinking much about them as we speak with others or tell stories about things we did with our friends or at work. When it comes time to write a paper, however, things get a little muddier. When should you quote? When should you paraphrase? How much quoted or paraphrased material should you use in your essay?

Quoting

A quotation is one of the ways you may make use of a source. You can use quotations to support and illustrate points in your essay. Carefully selected quotations also help establish your credibility by demonstrating that you are familiar with key sources.

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You will need to determine when to quote and how long each quotation should be. These questions will be addressed in the next two sections. Once you have determined the answers to those questions, certain strategies will help you smoothly fit quotations into your writing:

- Signal phrases help you integrate quoted material into your essay.
- Quotations must work within the grammar of your sentences, whether you are quoting phrases or complete sentences.
- Quotations must be properly punctuated.
- Quotations must be properly documented.

When Should I Quote?

Quote when the exact wording is necessary in order to make your point. For example, if you were analyzing the style choices in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, you would quote because it would be important to illustrate exact wording in order to have a discussion around word choice and sentence structure. You would also quote if the exact wording captures information, tone, or emotion that would be lost if the source were reworded.

Quote only as many words as are necessary to capture the original information, tone, or expression in the new context you are providing. Lengthy quotations actually can backfire on a writer because key words from the source may be hidden among less important words. In addition, your own words will be crowded out. You may be quoting when you should instead be explaining the significance of the quoted material.
and making it work within the context of your own writing. Never quote a paragraph when a sentence will suffice; never quote a sentence when a phrase will suffice; never quote a phrase when a word will suffice.

Source: It has begun. It is awful — continuous and earthquaking.

Quoting to preserve emotion: One nurse described an artillery exchange between the two sides as "awful — continuous and earthquaking" (Diary of a nursing sister, 1915, n.p.).

Paraphrasing

A paraphrase preserves information from a source but does not preserve its exact wording. A paraphrase uses vocabulary and sentence structure that is largely different from the language in the original. A paraphrase may preserve specialized vocabulary shared by everyone in a field or discipline; otherwise, the writer paraphrasing a source starts fresh, creating new sentences that repurpose the information in the source so that the information plays a supportive role in its new location.

When Should I Paraphrase?

Paraphrase when information from a source can help you explain or illustrate a point you are making in your own essay, but when the exact wording of the source is not crucial.

Source: I divide this map into two parts: that which anyone can do now, and that which requires the help of lawmakers.

Paraphrase: Lessig (2004) argues that legislators will need to address the problem but that other people can get involved as well (p. 275).

If you were analyzing Lessig’s style, you might want to quote his map metaphor; however, if you were focusing on his opinions about the need to reform copyright law, a paraphrase would be appropriate.

When Does Paraphrasing Become Plagiarism?

It is important to check your paraphrase against the source material to make sure it is both accurate and original. Inexperienced writers sometimes use the thesaurus method of paraphrasing — that is, they simply rewrite the source material, replacing most of the words with synonyms. This constitutes a misuse of sources. A true paraphrase restates ideas using the writer’s own language and style. A paraphrase should use vocabulary and sentence structure different from the source’s vocabulary and sentence structure.

Source: Citizens of this generation witnessed the first concerted attempt to disseminate knowledge about disease prevention and health promotion, downplaying or omitting altogether information about disease treatment.

Potential plagiarism: People of this period observed the first organized effort to share information about preventing disease and promoting health, de-emphasizing or skipping completely information about treating diseases (Murphy, 1991, p. 141).

The sentence structure of the bad paraphrase is identical to the sentence structure of the source, matching it almost word for word. The writer has provided an in-text citation pointing to Murphy as the source of the information, but she is in fact plagiarizing because she hasn’t written her own sentence.
Signal Phrases to Introduce Quotations and Paraphrases

Use **signal phrases** that mention your source to help your reader distinguish between the source and your own ideas. Mentions of sources may be called **attributions**. Attributions often rely on verbs that capture the act of expression.

Some verbs of expression:
- Admit
- Argue
- Assert
- Claim
- Complain
- Observe
- Point out
- Report
- State
- Write

Use different verbs of expression to avoid being monotonous, but also because some verbs are better than others for specific situations. For example, to stress weakness in a source’s argument, you might choose to write that your source admits or concedes a point.

Some signal phrases do not make use of verbs but rely on phrases like **according to**, **in the opinion of**, or **in the view of**.

Reflect Poll: Forms of Source Inclusion

Which form of including sources do you think would be the most difficult?
- Summary
- Quoting
- Paraphrasing

Expand: Summarizing Information

Overview

Sometimes, we quote or paraphrase when really we ought to summarize. Summarizing information can help you determine whether you have a complete handle on the material. It can also be used as a study tool or a writing tool, so it’s important to understand what summarizing is and how to do it.

Summarizing

Proficient students understand that summarizing — identifying what is most important and restating the text (or other media) in your own words — is an important tool for college success. After all, if you really know a subject, you will be able to summarize it. If you cannot summarize a subject — even if you have memorized all the facts about it — you can not be absolutely sure that you have absorbed the material. And, if you truly learn a subject, you will still be able to summarize it months or years from now.
Proficient students may monitor their understanding of a text by summarizing as they read. If a student can write a one or two sentence summary of each paragraph after reading it, then that is a good sign they have correctly understood the content. If they cannot summarize the main idea of each paragraph, comprehension has broken down.

As you write a summary, remember the following:

- A summary should be in the form of a paragraph.
- A summary begins with an introductory sentence that states the text’s title, author, and main point.
- A summary is written in your own words.
- A summary contains only the ideas of the original text. Do not insert any of your own opinions, interpretations, deductions, or comments into a summary.
- Identify, in order, significant sub-claims the author uses to defend the main point.
- Copy word-for-word three separate passages from the essay that you think support and/or defend the main point of the essay.
- Cite each passage by signaling the work and the author, putting quotation marks around the passages you chose, and putting the number of the paragraph where the passages can be found, immediately after the passage.
- Using source material from the essay is important. Why? Defending claims with source material is what you will be asked to do when writing papers for your college professors.
- Write a last sentence that “wraps up” your summary; often a simple rephrasing of the main point.

When you paraphrase material from a source, you restate the information from an entire sentence or passage in your own words using your own original sentence structure. A paraphrased source differs from a summarized source in that you focus on restating the ideas, not condensing them.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

A quick guide to the forms of source inclusion
- Link to resource: https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/when-to-summarize-paraphrase-and-quote

A page that outlines when students should quote, paraphrase, or summarize
- Link to resource: https://www.uhv.edu/student-success-center/resources/a-d/decide-when-to-quote-paraphrase-and-summarize/

A page that helps students avoid plagiarism when they incorporate sources into their writing
- Link to resource: https://www.mesacc.edu/~paoih30491/ArgumentsQuoteSummarizeParaphr.html

Lesson Glossary

quotation: an excerpted passage made up of exact words from the source, in which you must be careful to let your reader know that these words were not originally yours
paraphrase: source inclusion that preserves information from a source but does not preserve its exact wording; should be used when information from a source can help you explain or illustrate a point, but when the exact wording of the source is not crucial
**summary**: when you identify the most important ideas and concepts and restate the text (or other media) in your own words; often reserved for the times you need to condense large portions of material into only a few words or sentences

**signal phrases**: expressions that help your reader distinguish between the source and your own ideas

**attributions**: source mentions

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**Check Your Knowledge**

1. Quoting, paraphrasing, and summary can all be used interchangeably.
   a. True
   b. False

2. You should not insert any of your own opinions, interpretations, deductions, or comments into a summary.
   a. True
   b. False

3. Potential plagiarism occurs when a writer takes a sentence from a source and inserts synonyms without rewriting the sentence as a whole.
   a. True
   b. False

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**Answer Key:**

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**Citations**

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