

QUOTING, SUMMARIZING, & PARAPHRASING

When writing a research paper, you will be asked to include support for your arguments using sources such as books or journal articles. In order to refer to information from these sources you can (1) quote exact words, (2) paraphrase specific ideas, or (3) summarize the entire work. Deciding which of these three options for referencing a source should be applied depends on the information being used, its length and clarity, and your purpose for including it.

DIRECT QUOTING	PARAPHRASE	SUMMARIZE
Quoting a source means that you use a source's exact words to convey their point. Quotations are most useful in situations when the author's exact wording is important, or when you feel that the author's wording is clear and concise.	Paraphrasing a source means that you use your own words to discuss a specific source's idea. This is often useful in situations when you can state this idea more clearly or concisely that the source has, or if you need to re-contextualize the source.	Summarizing a source means that you can capture the overall point or main idea of a source. For example, you might summarize an entire movie's plot or a book's major theme.
USE A QUOTATION WHEN:	PARAPHRASE WHEN:	SUMMARIZE WHEN:
The author's exact wording is significant to the reader's understanding of that idea.	The author's exact wording is not significant to the reader's understanding of the idea.	The work is being referenced a whole.
The author's quotation states the idea clearly and concisely (i.e., it cannot be significantly shortened or clarified by rewording)	The author's quotations can be made more clear and/or concise by rewording and restructuring it.	Central ideas are being referenced that cannot be isolated to a small range of pages.
The author's exact wording is retained when it is incorporated into the paper.	The author's exact wording is significantly changed when it is incorporated into the paper, and the sentence structure itself is altered. (Paraphrase involves more than changing one or two words).	The summary offers a general, "big picture" explanation of important ideas, plot points, or themes in the source under discussion.
A citation is used to reference the author and page number from which the exact words were obtained.	A citation is used to reference the author and page number from which the idea was obtained.	The summary includes an in-text reference to the author's name and the source's title.

DIRECT QUOTATION

The quotation should appear exactly as it does in the source being used, although you may use a bracketed ellipsis to indicate any changes (i.e., omissions or additions) you make in order to make your sentences grammatically correct. Remember that you must put quotation marks around all quoted material.

EXAMPLE: As she reflects upon her transformation into a poet in her memoir *Lit*, Mary Karr explains, “I’d spent way more years worrying about how to look like a poet – buying black clothes, smearing on scarlet lipstick, languidly draping myself over thrift store furniture – that I had learning how to assemble words in some discernible order” (97).

Here, a quotation is used to stress Karr’s explanation of her experience in her own words. A citation is needed to refer the reader to the page where the exact quotation was located in Karr’s text. Note that Karr’s name is not needed for the in-text citation because the writer stated the name in the signal phrase that directly precedes the quotation.

SUMMARY

Summarizing is particularly useful for condensing “big picture” ideas into a discussion of the work in general and in its entirety.

EXAMPLE: In her 2009 memoir *Lit*, Karr exposes her struggles with alcoholism, an unfulfilling marriage, and an unhappy childhood as she reveals her attempts to heal and make peace with her past.

Here, a summary is used to explain the plot and central themes of the entire memoir in an abbreviated fashion. Because the author and title of the work are mentioned in the sentence, no citation is needed for this summary. Also, no page number is necessary because the work of summary is meant to summarize a text more holistically rather than something on a specific page in the text.

PARAPHRASE

For paraphrasing, strive for brevity while capturing the idea of a sentence or paragraph’s point (think “smaller picture,” or local ideas). For example, instead of quoting a whole paragraph, you might paraphrase the main idea in the paragraph in a sentence or two. It is also a common practice to paraphrase after providing a direct quotation in order to better explain an abstract or complex piece of evidence to your reader.

EXAMPLE: Reflecting on her new career as a struggling writer, Karr explains that she was more concerned with physically resembling a poet than working on her writing (97).

Here, a paraphrase is useful because it describes the same idea that the author intended, but it clarifies the point for a reader who may not be familiar with Karr’s work. It also shortens the sentence significantly. A citation is needed for this paraphrase because it refers to a specific section in the text that has been restated differently.

