Decide When to Quote, Paraphrase, and Summarize

By integrating source material into your paper, you can add credibility, complexity, and support to your argument. In this handout, we’ll look at how to decide when to quote, paraphrase, and summarize.

Whether quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing, you should follow some general rules about integrating your source material.

1. Source material cannot make your points for you. Source material can back up your points or provide material for you to argue against; therefore, you will typically have to introduce source material and comment on how it helps prove your point. Essentially, source material has no significance without your commentary to provide context and meaning.

2. Choose important or significant information that effectively relates to or supports your points. (Depending on the type of paper you are writing, you may need to present information that does not agree or support the points in your paper. This most often occurs when you are writing against a policy, plan, or procedure. Oftentimes, you will have to present the dissenting view in order to show flaws, weaknesses, or other errors within the opposing position.)

3. Always be faithful to the meaning of the source material that you include in your paper.

4. Cite appropriately and integrate the quote, paraphrase, or summary into the text effectively. Consult the APA, MLA, or other documentation manual or the Academic Center’s Quick Guides for information on how to cite and the Academic Center handout “Signal the Use of a Source” for ideas on how to integrate source material.

What are the differences among quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing?
A quote is the exact wording of the source material (either written or spoken). Quotes match the original source word for word.

A paraphrase is a detailed restatement in your own words of a written or sometimes spoken source material. Apart from the changes in organization, wording, and sentence structure, the paraphrase should be nearly identical in meaning to the original passage. It should also be near the same length as the original passage and present the details of the original.

A summary is a condensed version of a passage. Similar to paraphrasing, summarizing involves using your own words and writing style to express another author's ideas. Unlike the paraphrase, which presents important details, the summary presents only the most important ideas of the passage.
When should I use quotes?
Using quotations is the easiest way to include source material, but quotations should be used carefully and sparingly. While paraphrasing and summarizing provide the opportunity to show your understanding of the source material, quoting may only show your ability to type it. Having said that, there are a few very good reasons that you might want to use a quote rather than a paraphrase or summary:

1. **Accuracy**: You are unable to paraphrase or summarize the source material without changing the author’s intent.
2. **Authority**: You may want to use a quote to lend expert authority for your assertion or to provide source material for analysis.
3. **Conciseness**: Your attempts to paraphrase or summarize are awkward or much longer than the source material.
4. **Unforgettable language**: You believe that the words of the author are memorable or remarkable because of their effectiveness or historical flavor. Additionally, the author may have used a unique phrase or sentence, and you want to comment on words or phrases themselves.

When you decide to quote, be careful of relying too much upon one source or quoting too much of a source and make sure that your use of the quote demonstrates an understanding of the source material. Essentially, you want to avoid having a paper that is a string of quotes with occasional input from you.

Think of the quote as a rare and precious jewel.

When should I paraphrase?
You will want to paraphrase or summarize when the **wording** of the source is less important than the **meaning** of the source. The paraphrase and summary allow you to maintain continuity of style in your paper and show your mastery of source material. A paraphrase may be preferred to a summary because paraphrases are more detailed and specific. You may use the paraphrase often for the following reasons:

- **To change the organization of ideas for emphasis.** You may have to change the organization of ideas in source material so that you can emphasize the points that are most related to your paper. You should remember to be faithful to the meaning of the source.
- **To simplify the material.** You may have to simplify complex arguments, sentences, or vocabulary.
- **To clarify the material.** You may have to clarify technical passages or specialized information into language that is appropriate for your audience.

When you decide to paraphrase, avoid keeping the same structure of ideas, sentence structure, or just changing some of the words. Be careful not to add your ideas into the paraphrase and to be faithful to the meaning of the source material.

When should I summarize?
Again, you will want to paraphrase or summarize when the wording of the source is less important than the meaning of the source. The paraphrase and summary allow you to maintain continuity of style in your paper and show your mastery of source material. A summary may be preferred to a paraphrase because summaries can provide a brief overview of a text. The summary is very flexible. For example, you could summarize a book in a sentence, or in several paragraphs, depending on your writing situation and audience. You may use the summary often for the following reasons:
• To condense the material. You may have to condense or to reduce the source material to draw out the points that relate to your paper.
• To omit extras from the material. You may have to omit extra information from the source material to focus on the author’s main points.
• To simplify the material. You may have to simplify the most important complex arguments, sentences, or vocabulary in the source material.

When you decide to summarize, avoid keeping the same structure of ideas and/or sentence structure. Also avoid just changing some of the words. Be careful not to add your ideas into the summary and to be faithful to the meaning of the source material.

Now, let’s practice quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing by making a chart of when to quote, paraphrase, or summarize. Use the information in this handout to practice your quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing skills and fill in the boxes below.

When should I . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote?</th>
<th>Paraphrase?</th>
<th>Summarize?</th>
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For information on how to paraphrase and summarize, consult the Academic Center’s handouts titled “Learn to Paraphrase” and “Learn to Summarize.”

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