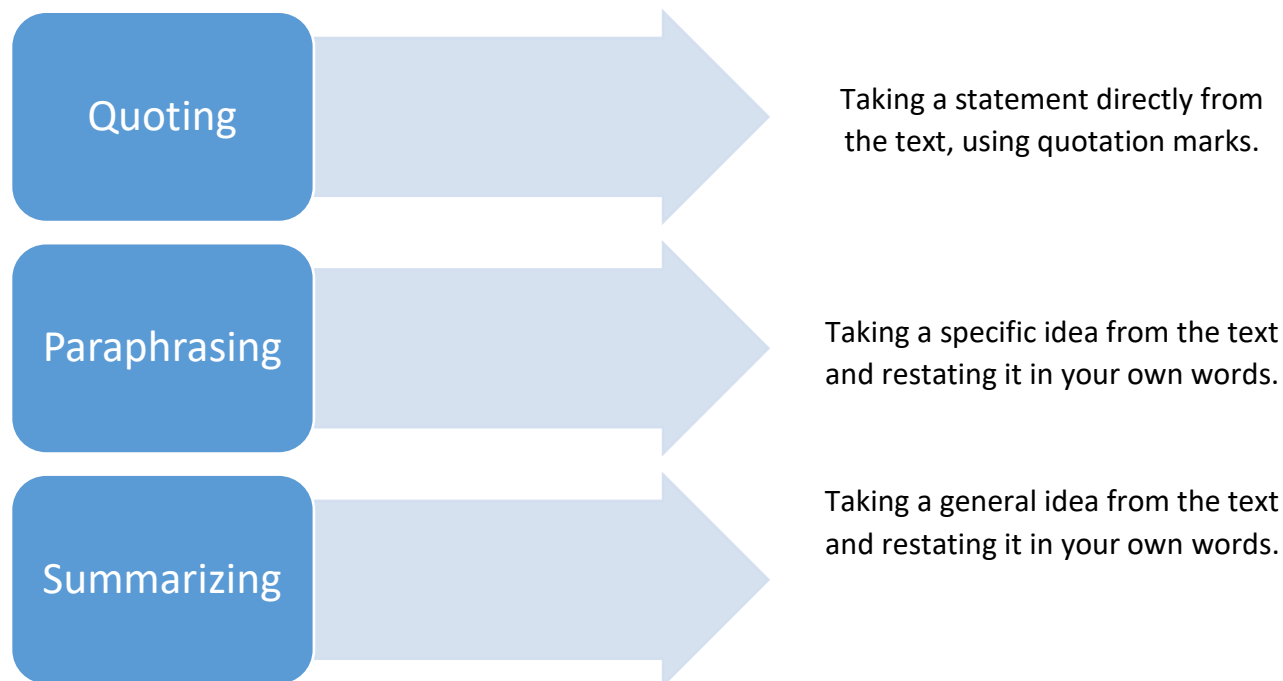


Paraphrasing

BASICS: WHY DO WE NEED IT?

SUNY POTSDAM COLLEGE WRITERS' BLOCK



To Paraphrase Well:

- work hard to understand the original passage: it's only when you understand the original that you can put it into new words effectively
- put the text in your own words
- use quotation marks within your paraphrase, if you quote three words or more
- use a citation every time, even when you've put the source in your own words
- use the correct form of in-text (parenthetical) citation and bibliography entry
- use credible sources—a good paraphrase of a bad source is still bad writing

Try Not to Make These Common Mistakes:

- don't change the meaning of the original text
- don't copy and paste the passage and then make some minor changes—you need to change a source's words, structure, and order into your own work
- don't use the exact words—unless you use a direct quotation, then put them inside quotation marks

Paraphrasing vs. Summarizing

A summary is a record of what the text says overall. It highlights the main points and provides an overview of the work as a whole.

A paraphrase is a more in-depth record of a specific section of the text. It focuses on specific details and presents them carefully. It also shows that you understand what is happening in the text and can explain it in your own words.

EXERCISE: SUMMARY OR PARAPHRASE?

One of these paragraphs is a summary, the other a paraphrase. Both are about the same episode of a TV show. Determine which is a summary and which is a paraphrase.

The team investigates the mysterious deaths of several firefighters. They find that the victims died from an alien infection, and in the course of their investigation Agent Simmons is infected. Agent Fitz works along with the rest of the team to try to find the cure and save her ("F.Z.Z.T."). [Full citation would be: "F.Z.Z.T." *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, written by Joss Whedon, Jed Whedon, and Maurissa Tancharoen, directed by Joss Whedon, ABC, 2013.]

As they try to find the cure and save Simmons, Agent Fitz stays by her side. He cannot enter the lab without risking being infected, so he sits against the sliding glass door and talks to Simmons through it. They get into a slightly heated debate as their worry makes them lash out, Fitz claiming that they wouldn't be in the situation at all if they had just stayed in the indoor lab they used to work in ("F.Z.Z.T.").

See the difference? The first paragraph is a summary of the episode, like you might see on a DVD jacket. It provides the basic plot of the episode. The second paragraph is a lot more detailed and specific. It's a paraphrase of one scene in that episode.

Signal Phrases

When you introduce a quote, use a signal phrase like "King asserts that" before the quote. It's a good way to set the reader up for a quote. Do this for every quote.

... the Apple computer. According to Steve Jobs, "_____."

Compare that to this example:

... the Apple computer. "_____."

The second example didn't prepare the reader for a quote, so it seemed really sudden. Yes, you are using a quote to support your argument, but you can do more than just drop it into your paper. Using signal phrases keeps everything clear.

Once you've used your signal phrase and quotation, don't forget to explain how the quote fits your analysis!

Citing

Since paraphrasing relies on someone else's ideas, you need to give them credit. Cite every time you paraphrase. It's better to cite too much than too little. Whenever you write something that isn't your original idea, cite it. If you paraphrase and then start analyzing, the analysis is your original work. The paraphrase still needs to be cited. If you don't cite it, you might be plagiarizing.

Plagiarism doesn't just mean taking someone else's exact words! Plagiarism refers to taking someone else's words *or ideas or information*, and presenting them as your own.

In both of the paragraphs above, in-text citations are needed. The material being discussed belongs to someone else, so we have to give them credit.

It's also important to change the structure of whatever you're talking about. If your source reads, "the invention of the printing press was crucial," then it's not good enough to say, "the creation of the printing press was important." It can be considered plagiarism. You would need to change it more, like "an important development was the creation of the printing press." This way, the meaning is the same, but you've put it into your own words. Paraphrasing, not plagiarizing.

You accidentally plagiarize when you....

- Keep the original words or sentence structure in the paraphrase without using quotation marks
- Cite only the first time they paraphrase, instead of including an in-text citation for every paraphrase
- Use three or more exact words without quotation marks or citing the source

Keep these things in mind as you write. Plagiarism is a serious thing that can hurt your academic career – even if it was completely unintentional.

MORE INFORMATION

Paraphrasing [overview](#)

Page on [accurate paraphrasing](#), more information on side tabs