

Handout: Paraphrase, Summary, and Quotation for Smart, Ethical Writing (and Note-taking)

Plagiarism: Using the ideas or words of others and presenting them as if they were your own. If you fail to give proper credit to the author of a passage, or the person with whom a unique idea originated, you give the impression that those ideas or words are your own. *Proper credit* means documenting and citing your sources (whether paraphrased, summarized, or quoted), using a commonly accepted method such as APA or MLA. It also means using quotation marks when necessary.

You can evade the dangers of plagiarism by doing two simple things: Let readers your know (1) which words, phrases, passages, or ideas are not your own and (2) indicate where you found those words or ideas. This is achieved through proper citation (we will learn more about plagiarism later in the course).

Paraphrase: *verb* “express the meaning of (something) using different words.” *noun* “a rewording of a passage.” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary)

From Bruce Ballenger’s popular research text The Curious Researcher: to “take possession of the information, make sense of it for yourself, and then remake it sensibly in your own words” (83).

Things to remember when you take notes and paraphrase:

- Take all notes and paraphrase all material with your topic or issue (and later on your thesis) in mind. Only take notes from your material that is relevant to your topic or thesis. Constantly ask yourself “How will this information strengthen my paper by supporting my argument?” Information that challenges your point of view can also be helpful: remember to ask yourself “How can I show the lack of reasoning or logic in this argument; how can I prove this person or author *wrong*?”
- Don’t worry too much about grammar, structure or mechanics while note-taking. It will only slow you down. Be yourself; write like you would if you were taking notes in a lecture or organizing your thoughts in a free-write. You don’t want to end up sounding like the authors that you’re reading; you want to sound like *yourself*.
- If you try to take notes on everything about your topic, you might as well move into the library for the rest of the term and you’ll probably never make it to the draft-writing stage. Preview your sources and scan them. Decide what is most important or interesting. Which sources *sound* the best, carry the most depth and weight. Once you’ve found the “good-stuff,” note-taking becomes more efficient.
- Although this is informal, you really are beginning the writing process. If you take good notes now, writing your paper will be a lot easier. Don’t just paraphrase, quote and summarize mechanically; **this is an active process**. Include your own thoughts. If you always keep your topic or thesis in the foreground and take thoughtful notes, you will see your paper begin to take shape and become a place for your ideas to thrive!
- **A commonly recommended method for paraphrasing** is to read the material (or a portion of the material) that you wish to paraphrase and then set it aside before you write your paraphrase. You will be much more likely to avoid using the same words or sentence structure as the original if you aren’t looking at in when you write your own version.

Summary: *noun* “a brief statement of the main points of something.” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary).

To “[capture] the basic idea, argument, or theme from the original” (Ballenger 113).

Things to remember when you summarize:

- Summary is *brief*. For this reason it is best to use it when you want to bring across the general idea behind one aspect of a piece of writing, one part of an argument, or one paragraph or page of something too detailed or long-winded for the purposes of your paper.
- Summary is probably too general, in most cases, for material that you want to rely on heavily to make a point or information that plays a key role in the development of your paper.
- It may, however, become a useful tool when you enter the actual paper-writing phase. Summary can be helpful in writing an introduction to a paper that will cover the same information in greater detail later on. Likewise, it is also a good tactic for conclusion writing to summarize what you have discussed in your paper (but *be careful*, the best conclusions go beyond mere summary and we will cover this later in more detail).
- As with paraphrasing: remember your topic/thesis; information should be relevant; don't lose sight of your own purpose, thoughts or voice.
- **A good strategy for summarizing** is to make sure that you capture the main ideas of a work by asking yourself what the overall meaning (or thesis) the author intends to express, by paying attention to the organization of the work, and by doing your best to distill the meaning of the whole into a restatement of the main points in your own words.
 - Looking over the entire work first and attempting to identify the thesis will save you time in summarizing and help to direct the remainder of your summary.
 - Paying attention to how the author organizes his or her work will help you to identify the key support for the thesis (the sub-claims or sub-topics).
 - One method for “distilling” the overall meaning of a work is to paraphrase the thesis and all the main or supporting points that you have identified and tie them together with any needed transitions or details that you feel are needed.

Quote: *verb* “repeat or copy out (a passage or remark by another).” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary).

About Quoting:

- Your paper should contain no more than 10 to 20 percent of quoted material.
- If you constantly use quotes in your note-taking, you're not thinking about your topic or the material that you're reading as much as if you paraphrase. It may seem like more work in the beginning, but the extra thought and effort will pay off when it comes time to write your paper.
- In The Curious Researcher, Bruce Ballenger lists some good reasons to quote:
 1. “...when someone says or writes something that is distinctive in a certain way and when restating it in your own words wouldn't possibly do the thought justice” (88).
 2. “...when [someone's] explanation of a process or idea is especially clear” (89).
 3. “Sometimes, it's desirable to quote an expert on your topic who is widely recognized in the field. . . the voice of an authority can lend credit to your argument” (89).
- Make sure you mark your quotations clearly in your notes in order to avoid any *accidental* plagiarism.
- Don't forget to introduce your quotes. This is another topic that we will discuss in greater detail at a later time; however, it is useful to note here that quotations seem abrupt when they are not introduced. Try using introductions such as “Smith argues . . .”, “A noted specialist in her field, Jones contends . . .”, or “In his article titled ‘Do We Fear the Right Things,’ Myers proposes . . .”

A final note: remember that when you paraphrase, summarize or quote, you are representing someone else's ideas and materials. Represent them fairly. Do not use their ideas out of context in order to prove a point or support an idea of your own that is not represented in the material from which you gathered the information. If done purposefully, such practices are just as unethical as plagiarizing.

Work Cited:

Ballenger, Bruce. The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994.