
Summarize, Paraphrase, and Quote

Whether you are writing a lab report, term paper, proposal, etc., it's a critical skill to know how and when to summarize, paraphrase, and quote. This handout provides steps to help you learn the basics and understand important distinctions between the three. See the style guide (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) in your particular discipline for more information.

Summarize

A **summary** contains the most important information in a document (paragraph, chapter, article, book, report, etc.) written *in your own words*. It **condenses** the original work without distorting the essential meaning, omitting any key points, or adding any extra material.

Steps to writing a summary:

1. **Scan** to get an overall impression of the document's content and organization.
2. **Read carefully and underline/highlight** the most significant information.
 - Look for a statement of the main idea; it is most likely to appear in the introduction or conclusion.
 - Look for the organizational pattern of the document including obvious signals such as headings, bolded text, and explicit organizational statements.
 - Focus on principal concepts or arguments.
 - Do not be distracted by examples or details.
3. **Reread** the document to make sure you have an adequate understanding.
 - Write your summary using the sections you have highlighted or underlined.
 - Your summary should have the same basic outline as the original article.
 - Remember to edit your writing and provide a citation/reference.
4. **Do not include:**
 - Statements that say you are summarizing
 - References to the original, e.g., "As the graph on page 3 illustrates . . ."
 - Headings
 - Illustrations or tables
 - Your opinion or judgement
 - Information not included in the original
 - Examples

Paraphrase

When you **paraphrase** information you restate it *in your own words*, typically without condensing. It is useful when you want to relay information such as ideas and details from a source but don't need to quote. You must use your own original words and sentence structure, repeating only crucial parts such as key scientific terms.

Steps to paraphrasing:

1. Read the original passage.
2. Set the original aside, and write your paraphrase without referring to the original.
3. Compare your paraphrase with the original ensuring that you have used your own words and format as well as included all of the essential information.
4. If you find the wording is still very similar, consider quoting fragments/brief passages within the paraphrase.
5. Provide a citation/reference.

Note: If you are paraphrasing or summarizing and not using your own words—even if you credit your source—you are plagiarizing because you are “presenting the original phrasing as your own” (Reinking et al., 2010, 493).

Quote

A **quote** is an exact copy of text from the original source that is surrounded by quotation marks. Quotes are used when you want to capture the author's voice, and are effective when used selectively. Quotes are not commonly used in scientific writing. If you need to insert a word in a quote for clarity, enclose it in square brackets. If any incorrect spelling or grammar in the original might confuse readers, insert [*sic*] after the error (square brackets, italics). You must attribute quotes through citations/references.

Remember to:

- Introduce or incorporate a quotation in a clear, grammatically correct way.
- A short quotation is effective when integrated into a sentence.
- Longer quotations, e.g., more than four lines or 40 or more words (see your style guide), are typically displayed in a stand-alone block of text.

Remember: You must acknowledge any work that is not your own, otherwise you will be committing plagiarism. You do not need to cite common knowledge: information that is widely known and can be easily confirmed by the reader from any number of sources.

Reference

Reinking, James A. *Strategies for Successful Writing: A Rhetoric, Research Guide, Reader, and Handbook*. Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2010. Print.