

The NCWU Writing Center

PEL 146

Using Sources: Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing

When incorporating other's work and ideas into your own writing, you will likely use one of three methods: **quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing**. Knowing when and how to use these methods correctly improves your work and helps you avoid plagiarism. The method you choose will depend on the significance and amount of information you want to use.

Remember the most important rule of using any source: **"If you use a source, give credit."** How you give credit depends on the citation style (MLA, APA, CSE, etc.) you are using. The most common methods are including the author(s)/source in the sentence, adding a parenthetical citation to the end of the sentence, or creating a footnote/endnote.

Quoting

What is quoting?

Quoting involves **using the exact words and punctuation** from a source.

When should you quote?

You should quote a source in the following situations:

- When the specific language used is particularly important or striking
- When the language is already concise
- When a key concept is explained
- When it provides strong evidence for a point you want to make
- When you want to avoid accusations of bias or misrepresentation

How do you quote?

A quote copies the author(s)/source's words exactly and is indicated using quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quoted material ("...").

Quotes tend to be **short**, anywhere from a word or phrase to just a few sentences. To incorporate a quote into your paper, you can introduce it using a signal phrase (a few words that introduce the source) or by working a few quoted words or phrases into your own sentence. If you choose to do the latter, make sure you correctly convey the meaning of the quoted material.

Examples

Signal Phrase: According to C.S. Lewis, "Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: What! You too? I thought I was the only one."

Worked into Sentence: C.S. Lewis believed that finding out you are not "the only one," that there are other people who think like you, is how friendships are formed.

Long Quotes

Long quotes are any quotes that extend **beyond four typed lines**. These are usually cited differently than short quotes; however, most professors prefer that students avoid using more than one or two long quotes in a paper. Check your citation style guide for the correct formatting of a long quote.

Paraphrasing

What is paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing involves **rewording a small section** of a source, usually a sentence or paragraph, into your own language.

The NCWU Writing Center

PEL 146

When should you paraphrase?

You should paraphrase a source in the following situations:

- When you want to be more concise than the original
- When the language is too confusing or technical for your audience
- When you want to demonstrate your understanding of the concepts and ideas

How do you paraphrase?

The key to paraphrasing well is making sure that you understand the section you are paraphrasing and do not look at it as you write. This will ensure that you put the information into **your own words** and do not just replace a few words with synonyms. Check that your paraphrase maintains the meaning conveyed in the original language.

Example

Original: “Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: What! You too? I thought I was the only one.”

Unsuccessful Paraphrase: Camaraderie begins when a person says: Huh! You too? I didn’t know there were others. *This paraphrase is unsuccessful because it incorporates words from the original and keeps its grammatical and conceptual structure.*

Successful Paraphrase: C.S. Lewis believed friendship begins after a surprise revelation that someone else is like us.

Summarizing

What is summarizing?

Summarizing involves **explaining the major ideas** of a source in your own language.

When should you summarize?

You should summarize in the following situations:

- When you want to provide basic contextual information
- When the original is too long or wordy to include as a quote
- When you want to reference a source that is not the focus of your writing

How do you summarize?

Summary, like paraphrase, requires translating the author(s)/source’s ideas and concepts into your own words, so it is important to first carefully read and understand the source. Do not look at the source as you summarize, so you are not tempted to include its language. Check to make sure you have faithfully conveyed the meaning of the original. A summary can be several sentences (or even paragraphs) long depending on the importance of the information.

Example

C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is novel set in WWII about four children who discover the magical world of Narnia hidden inside a wardrobe in their caretaker’s home. They encounter mythical beings and talking animals and become embroiled in a struggle between the White Witch and the creatures of Narnia who are led by a lion named Aslan. One of the children is tempted by the witch and betrays Aslan to his death, but Aslan miraculously returns to life and slays the witch in battle. The children are made kings and queens of Narnia and grow into adults. During a hunt, they find their way back out of the wardrobe and are suddenly children again.

Important: When you use sources, you should always provide your own ideas, interpretations, and explanations. Remember, your professors want to see that you have thought through the information you collected and can use them as **starting points** for your own arguments. They are more interested in what you have to say than they are in your ability to repeat what you found.