

Avoiding Plagiarism

Most Americans believe that authors own their writing as well as the ideas in their writing. Therefore, to respect authors, you must give them credit for their writing and ideas. If you do not give authors credit, you have committed plagiarism, a very serious offense that may lead to a failing grade.

To avoid plagiarism, you can use **quotations, paraphrases, and summaries** to include other authors' ideas in your essays. When you quote, paraphrase, or summarize, you must also **cite** your sources to show where your words and ideas end and the other authors' words or ideas begin.

When and How to Cite

Both MLA and APA styles require you to use **parenthetical citation** and **signal phrases** to cite when you quote, paraphrase, or summarize another author's work. However, MLA style and APA style require different information in a **parenthetical citation**:

- **For MLA style quotations, paraphrases, and summaries:** place the author's last name and the page number (if there is one) in parentheses at the end of the sentence, for example (Karim 1).
- **For APA style paraphrases and summaries:** place the author's last name, followed by a comma, and the year of publication in parentheses at the end of the sentence, for example (Karim, 2010).
- **For APA style quotations:** place the author's last name, followed by a comma, the year of publication, *and* the page number (if there is one) in parentheses at the end of the sentence, for example (Karim, 2010, p. 1).

For more information on MLA or APA style citations, see our handouts: "What Is an MLA-Style Essay?" and "What Is an APA 7th Edition Student Style Essay?"

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Common Signal Phrases

| | |
|---|--|
| Author argues that | Author states that |
| Author believes that | Author claims that |
| Author implies that | Author reports that |
| Author suggests that | According to author, |
| In his/her book, <i>Title</i> , author maintains that | The main point of author's argument is |

Usually, however, instead of using a parenthetical citation, it is better to use a **signal phrase** or narrative citation, which is a phrase within the sentence that introduces the author and, sometimes, the title, or author and year in APA style.

You Must Cite If You

- Quote an author
- Paraphrase or summarize an author's words or ideas
- Use an author's photographs, charts, graphs, illustrations, etc.
- Include facts that not everyone who will read your paper knows
- Include ideas that not everyone agrees with

You Don't Need to Cite Paraphrases If

- Everyone who will read your paper already knows the information
- Every source that you read has the same facts
- The ideas are yours

What is Quoting?

Quoting is writing down an author's words exactly. Even if the words you want to quote are misspelled or a sentence has grammatical mistakes, you must copy it so that it is the same content as the original text.

- You do not have to quote an entire sentence; you may simply quote a phrase.
- You may change the first letter in the quotation from capital to lowercase or from lowercase to capital.
- You may leave out the original period or comma at the end of a quotation.

How to Quote Properly

- Put double quotation marks “ ” around all of the words you copy from the text.
- If the original sentence contains an error, write [sic] right after the error.
- If you change part of a quotation to make it fit better into the surrounding sentence, you can enclose the changed words in square brackets [].
- If you quote words that are already in quotation marks, change the original, double quotation marks to single quotation marks ‘ ’.

| Use of Single Quotation Marks When Quoting a Quote | |
|--|--|
| Original Quote | Neil Armstrong said, “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” |
| New Quote using the Original Quote | According to the news, “Neil Armstrong said, ‘That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.’” |

- Do not insert a quotation as a separate sentence, which is sometimes called a *dumped quote* and may confuse your readers. Instead, use a signal phrase to connect the quote to the rest of the paragraph.

| Comparison of a dumped quote to an effective insertion of a quote | |
|--|---|
| Confusing: How does the quote relate to the sentences before and after it? | By the time the battle ended, there were thousands of refugees. "I couldn't see the ground through all the feet around mine" (Numa 274). Within hours, the water problems began to take shape. |
| Clear: The signal phrase “One witness later said that he” connects the quote of one witness to the thousands of refugees. | By the time the battle ended, there were thousands of refugees. One witness later said that he "couldn't see the ground through all the feet around [his own]" (Numa 12). Within hours, the water problems began to take shape. |

- Use a parenthetical citation to include the page number or paragraph number where you found the quote unless the quote is from a website that does not have page numbers or paragraph numbers.

When to Use Quotations

Usually, it is better to paraphrase or summarize rather than to quote a source, but there are five times when it is better to quote:

1. The original writing is especially beautiful or descriptive.
2. You need to use those specific words to accurately show the original idea.
3. You want to show the author's style of writing.
4. The author is an expert whose writing will support your argument.
5. You are analyzing or critiquing the author's writing.

What is Paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is taking an author's writing and rewriting the *same idea with your own words and phrasing*. Simply replacing an author's words with synonyms or changing the order of the words in a sentence is *not paraphrasing*. This is plagiarism because you will not have changed the original sentence enough to call it your own writing.

- Usually, paraphrasing includes specific details, not general ideas.
- You can include numbers and statistics when you paraphrase, but you must write about them in your own way.

| Examples of Plagiarism Contrasted with Effective Paraphrasing | |
|--|---|
| Original Quotation | "If the existence of a signing ape was unsettling for linguists, it was also startling news for animal behaviorists" (Davis 26). |
| Plagiarism: The writer uses the same words, only changing the verb tense, so the new sentence is too similar to the original sentence. | The existence of a signing ape unsettled linguists and startled animal behaviorists (Davis 26). |
| Plagiarism: The writer only replaces certain words with synonyms but keeps the same sentence structure, so the new sentence is still too similar to the original. | If the presence of a sign-language-using chimp was disturbing for scientists studying language, it was also surprising to scientists studying animal behavior (Davis 26). |

Examples of Plagiarism Contrasted with Effective Paraphrasing

Proper Paraphrase: These sentences use a new sentence structure and new words while sharing the same information as the original quotation.

When they learned of an ape's ability to use sign language, both linguists and animal behaviorists were taken by surprise (Davis 26).

According to Flora Davis, linguists and animal behaviorists were unprepared for the news that a chimp could communicate with its trainers through sign language (26).

How to Paraphrase Properly

- Read the original document carefully until you are sure that you completely understand it.
- Imagine how you would explain what you read while not looking at the document.
- Write down your explanation, still not looking at the original document.
- Check the original text to make sure you correctly described the author's ideas.
- Use a signal phrase to introduce the paraphrase or include a citation at the end of the paraphrase.

What is Summarizing?

Summarizing is presenting an author's thesis statement and supporting ideas without including your opinion of those ideas. Unlike paraphrases, summaries do not usually include details; they simply relate the original document's topic and main ideas.

How to Summarize

- Read the original text carefully until you understand the author's main points.
- Find the author's thesis or main idea.
- Begin your summary by mentioning the author's name and the title of the document.
- Write one or two sentences that explain what the author's thesis or main idea is.
- Identify the document's most important supporting ideas.
- As a general rule, write 1-2 sentences for each supporting idea.

For Further Information

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, W.W. Norton, 2006.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 8th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2009.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. 7th ed., American Psychological Association, 2020.

Wyrick, Jean. *Steps to Writing Well with Additional Readings*, 7th ed., Thompson Wadsworth, 2008, pp. 384-6.