

Summarize, Paraphrase, or Quote?

"A *summary* is a relatively brief, objective account, in your own words, of the main ideas in a source passage." p. 579, Rosen and Behrens

"A *paraphrase* is a restatement, in your own words, of a passage of text. Its structure reflects the structure of the source passage. Paraphrases are sometimes the same length as the source passage, sometimes shorter. In certain cases--particularly if the source passage is written in densely constructed or jargon-laden prose--the paraphrase may be even longer than the original. . . . Keep in mind that only an occasional word (but not whole phrases) from the original source appears in the paraphrase, and that a paraphrase's sentence structure does not reflect that of the source." p. 580, Rosen and Behrens

A *quotation* uses the exact words of the original.

Summarize

To condense a long, detailed passage

Paraphrase

To retain the ideas in the original passage but put them in your own words, often because you want them to be clearer to your readers

Quote

To maintain a passage which is particularly well-written.

To present to the reader a passage which will be discussed in some detail

To set forth the exact wording (e.g., of a definition, law, etc.)

General Reasons

To bolster your point with the credibility or reputation of the source

To identify others' opinions, theories, and personal explanations

To present assertions of fact that are open to dispute

To present statistics

To establish your ethos or character, especially as a good, reliable scholar/researcher

To acknowledge help provided by friends, instructors, or others

To impress people with who you have read (e.g., to show what camp you are in, that you have read literature from the other camps, that you have been thorough in your research, or that you have read the classic works in the area)

To let the reader know where the document can be found

What Not to Quote

Do not quote “common knowledge”, facts available in a wide variety of sources, or your own independent ideas or primary research.

Common Knowledge

Telling people who have written few research papers that "common knowledge" need not be cited is not particularly useful unless explained in some detail. First, common knowledge to whom? Obviously, you must know the audience. Is it readers like yourself, the average adult with a college or university education, someone working in the discipline, or someone whose area of expertise is precisely your topic?

Common knowledge can be facts or interpretations. Oddly, commonly known facts do not have to be known exactly. For example, the typical adult with a university degree would probably know that George Bernard Shaw was an English playwright who lived around the turn of the century. You would not have to acknowledge a source for Shaw's birth and death dates: your readers would see the dates and think, "Yes, that looks right." The other reason you would not have to acknowledge a source here is that the information is readily available in all sorts of reference books.

It is difficult for someone new to an academic topic to discover what is common knowledge, for not only must everyone in the discussion know the fact or opinion, but they must know that everyone knows.

Ideas have a long and complicated history - to the point where some people question the possibility of having an idea that is uniquely, originally your own. If your readers are likely to question where you got the idea from, cite the source. Don't let the reader even suspect you of plagiarizing. If in doubt, cite.

If in doubt, you can also ask your instructor.

LSC 2000
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