SUMMARIZING, PARAPHRASING, AND QUOTING

This handout is intended to help you become more comfortable with the uses of and distinctions among summaries, paraphrases, and quotations.

What are the differences among summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting?

These three ways of incorporating other writers' work into your own writing differ according to the closeness of your writing to the source writing.

- **Summarizing** involves putting the main idea(s) into your own words, including only the main point(s). Although you are using your own words, it is still necessary to attribute the summarized ideas to the original source. Summaries are significantly shorter than the original and take a broad overview of the source material.

- **Paraphrasing** involves putting a passage from the source into your own words. A paraphrase must also be attributed to the original source. Paraphrased material is usually shorter than the original passage, taking a somewhat broader segment of the source and condensing it slightly.

- **Quotations** must be identical to the original, using a narrow segment of the source. They must match the source document word for word and must also be attributed to the original author.

Why use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries?

Quotations, paraphrases, and summaries serve many purposes. You might use them to:

- Provide support for claims or add credibility to your writing
- Refer to work that leads up to the work you are now doing
- Give examples of several points of view on a subject
- Call attention to a position that you wish to agree or disagree with
- Highlight a particularly striking phrase, sentence, or passage by quoting the original
- Distance yourself from the original by quoting it to show that the words are not your own
- Expand the breadth or depth of your writing

Writers frequently intertwine summaries, paraphrases, and quotations, including paraphrases of key points blended with quotations of striking or suggestive phrases as in the following example:

> *In his famous and influential work* The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud argues that dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious" (page #), expressing in coded imagery the dreamer's unfulfilled wishes through a process known as the "dream-work" (page #). According to Freud, actual but unacceptable desires are censored internally and subjected to coding through layers of condensation and displacement before emerging in a kind of rebus puzzle in the dream itself (page #).*

How and when should I summarize, paraphrase, or quote?

- **Summarizing:** Before you summarize a source in your paper, decide what your reader needs to know about that source in order to understand your argument. For example, if you are making an argument about a novel, avoid filling pages of your paper with details from the book that will distract or confuse your reader. Instead, add details sparingly, going only into the depth that is necessary for your reader to understand and appreciate your argument. Similarly, if you are writing a paper about a non-fiction article, highlight the most relevant parts of the argument for your reader, but do not include all of the background information and examples.

- **Paraphrasing:** When you use any part of a source in your paper, you will always need to decide whether to quote directly from the source or to paraphrase it. Unless you have a good reason to quote directly from the source, you should paraphrase the source. Make it clear to your reader why you are presenting this particular material from a source, and be sure that you have represented the author accurately, that you have used your own words consistently, and that you have cited the source.

- **Quotations:** As a basic rule of thumb, you should only quote directly from a text when it is important for your reader to see the actual language used by the author of the source. While paraphrase and summary are effective ways to introduce your reader to someone's ideas, quoting directly from a text allows you to introduce your reader to the way those ideas are expressed by showing such details as language, syntax, and cadence. There are several ways to integrate quotations into your text; often a short quotation works well when integrated into a sentence, while longer quotations can stand alone. Whatever their length, be sure you have a good reason to include a direct quotation when you decide to do so.

You can become more comfortable using these three techniques by summarizing an essay of your choice, using paraphrases and quotations as you go. It might be helpful to follow these steps:

- Read the entire text, noting the key points and main ideas.
- Summarize in your own words what the single main idea of the essay is.
- Paraphrase important supporting points that come up in the essay.
- Consider any words, phrases, or brief passages that you believe should be quoted directly.

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