Paraphrasing, Summarising, and Quoting

It can be difficult to rewrite information and your ideas from your reading in your own words. Despite this, it is better to paraphrase than quote, as explaining your own words shows that you really understand the reading you have done. This tip sheet shows you some strategies for writing about what you have read.

What are the differences?

Paraphrasing	Summarising	Quoting
• Does not match source word for word • Involves putting a section of a text into your own words • Changes the words or phrasing in a passage but keeps the original meaning • Must be referenced	• Does not match source word for word • Involves putting the main ideas into your own words, and including only the main points • Is usually much shorter than the original • Must be referenced	• Matches the source word for word • Usually a brief piece of the text • Quotation marks used to enclose quoted words • If the quotation comprises 40 or more words, display it in a freestanding block of text and omit the quotation marks • Must be referenced, including page or paragraph number

Avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is when you copy directly from someone else's work without acknowledging (citing) the original author. In other words, it appears as if the work is all your own. This looks as if you are taking credit for someone else's work. In academic writing, it is considered to be as serious as cheating on an exam.

What is a paraphrase?

A paraphrase is when you write published information and ideas in your own words, without changing its original meaning. It is a legitimate way to include the ideas of others, when appropriately referenced. A paraphrase is usually about the same length as the original, as opposed to a summary which is usually much shorter. It is important that the sentence structure and the vocabulary are different from the original.

Writing a paraphrase

Use the following steps to write a paraphrase:

1. change the structure of the sentences

2. change the words

It is not enough to do just one of these; you need to change both the structure and the words. You must do this to avoid plagiarism.

Changing the structure of a paragraph

Use the following steps to change the structure of a paragraph.

1. Read the original until you understand its full meaning.

2. Write down the main points or words. Do not copy down entire sentences.

3. Put the paragraph / book away and using the main points, write your paraphrase from memory. This means that you are not copying the text word for word.

4. Check what you have written against the original text. You should check that they are not the same, as well as checking that you have not left anything out.

Changing the words

People's writing styles and the words they use are very distinct. It is generally easy to tell when someone has copied directly from a textbook, as the language and the words used change from the writer's normal style and vocabulary. To paraphrase a text, follow these steps.

1. Read the sentence or paragraph you want to paraphrase a number of times to get the meaning of the text. Once you understand it, write out the sentence in your own words. If you do not fully understand the text, do not attempt to paraphrase it, as you will just copy it.

2. Circle the specialised words, i.e. the words that the text is actually about. These will need to be included in your paraphrase, as without these words, the meaning of the paraphrase can change.

3. Underline any keywords that can be changed.

4. Find other words and phrases that have similar meanings that can be used to replace the keywords in the text. Use a thesaurus or dictionary, or look for synonyms in your word processing software.

What is a summary?

A summary is a concise record of the main points, of a text presented in your own words. Unlike a paraphrase, which is generally of a similar length to the original text, a summary is much shorter. When summarising, you should not alter:

- the author's original idea(s)

- the degree of certainty with which the ideas are expressed.

To create a good summary, you should read the article or text a number of times to develop a clear understanding of:

- the author's ideas and intentions

- the meaning and details

- the force with which the ideas are expressed

Writing a summary

Use the following steps to write a summary.

1. Write notes in point form using keywords; this will make it easier to express the ideas in your own words.

2. Write the summary directly from your notes without re-reading the passage.

3. Refer back to the original to ensure that your summary is a true reflection of the writer's ideas.

Tips

Topic sentences provide a quick outline of the topic and the main idea in a paragraph.

When summarising a chapter or article, the introduction and conclusion should provide a good overview of the content.

Summaries need to be referenced. Whether you have summarised or paraphrased an author's words, ideas, or a diagram, a reference to the original source must be provided.

Using quotes

Direct quotes show where another person's original thoughts, words, ideas, images etc., have been used word for word. Quotations are used to:

- acknowledge the direct use of someone's words, thoughts, etc.

- enable the reader to access your sources.

Direct quotes

Reference with appropriate author, year and page number.

Short quotes

Follow these steps to use direct quotes in your assignments:

1. Copy the exact words from the original source.
2. Use quotation marks at the beginning and end of the copied text

Block quotes

If the direct quote is more than 40 words, it is a block quote. Display it in a freestanding block of text and omit the quotation marks. Also indent the block quote a couple of centimetres.