

Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Acknowledging Sources

College writing often involves integrating information from published sources into your own writing. This means you need to be careful not to plagiarize: “to steal and pass off (the ideas and words of another) as one’s own” and to “present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.”¹ The University of Wisconsin takes very seriously this act of “intellectual burglary,” and the penalties are severe. Paying attention to the following should help keep you honest.

What Must Be Documented

Quotations 1. If you use an author’s specific *word or words*, you must place those words within quotation marks *and* you must credit the source.

Ideas 2. If you borrow an author’s specific *ideas*, you must document their source. As Birk and Birk explain, it as plagiarism

when the writer presents, as his (sic) own, *the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, the pattern of thought* of someone else, even though he expresses it in his own words. The language may be his, but he is presenting as the work of his brain, and taking credit for, the work of another’s brain. He is, therefore, guilty of plagiarism if he fails to give credit to the original author of the pattern of ideas.

This aspect of plagiarism presents difficulties because the line is sometimes unclear between borrowed thinking and thinking that is our own. We all absorb information and ideas from other people. In this way we learn. But in the normal process of learning, new ideas are digested; they enter our minds and are associated and integrated with ideas already there: When they come out again, their original pattern is broken; they are re-formed and rearranged. We have made them our own. Plagiarism occurs when a sequence of ideas is transferred from a source to a paper without the process of digestion, integration, and reordering in the writer’s mind, and without acknowledgment in the paper.²

¹ Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1993), 888.

² Newmann P. Birk and Genevieve B. Birk, *A Handbook of Grammar, Rhetoric, Mechanics and Usage*, 5th ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 142.

Common
knowledge

3. It is not necessary to document certain factual information considered to be in the public domain: e.g., birth and death dates of well-known figures, generally accepted dates of military, political, literary and other historical events. In general, factual information contained in multiple standard reference works can usually be considered to be in the public domain. If, however, you use the exact words of the reference source, you must credit the source. If in doubt, be cautious and cite the source.

To Create a successful Summary or Paraphrase

1. When reading source material, treat each passage as a discrete unit of thought to be assimilated into your own thoughts. Try to understand the passage as a whole, rather than pausing to write down ideas or phrases that seem, on first inspection, significant. *Read purposefully*, with a larger conceptual framework in clear view, and *integrate* each reading into that controlling purpose.
2. After reaching a clear understanding of the ideas contained in the source, *summarize* that information *in your own words*. *Remember that you are taking notes, not copying down quotations*. Your task is to *extract, distill and compress* essential content that will be useful in creating a paraphrase. Occasionally you may find it useful to quote words or phrases directly from the source, but limit yourself to very brief quotations, and be sure to use quotation marks and to record page numbers in your notes.

Sample Paraphrases—Unsuccessful and Successful

Based on paragraph A below, consider two improper ways of handling source material: (B) word-for-word plagiarism and (C) “The Mosaic.” Finally, paragraph D provides a model of a legitimate paraphrase.

A. The Source

“How important is our power of nonanalytical thought to the practice of science? It’s the most important thing we have, declares the Princeton physicist historian, Thomas Kuhn, who argues that major breakthroughs occur only after scientists finally concede that certain physical phenomena cannot be explained by extending the logic of old theories. Consider the belief that the sun and the planets move around the earth, which reigned prior to 1500. This idea served nicely for a number of centuries, but then became too cumbersome to describe the motions of heavenly bodies. So the Polish astronomer Copernicus invented a new reality that was based on a totally different ‘paradigm’ or model—that the earth and planets move around the sun” (Hoover, 124).

B. Word-for-word plagiarism

Non-analytic thought is considered very important to the practice of science by Princeton physicist historian Thomas Kuhn who claims that major breakthroughs happen only when

scientists finally concede that some physical phenomena defy explanation by extending the logic of old theories. One idea which served nicely for many centuries but then became too cumbersome was the belief that the sun and planets revolved around the earth. This was held prior to 1500 until Copernicus invented a new reality: the earth and planets move around the sun.

The underlined words are directly copies from the source. Notice that the writer has not only “borrowed” Hoover’s ideas with no acknowledgment, he or she has maintained the author’s method of expression and sentence structure. Even if the student-writer had acknowledged Hoover as the source of these ideas, this passage would still be plagiarized because much of its exact working comes from Hoover with no quotation marks to indicate that the language is Hoover’s. It’s not that using a single phrase such as “prior to 1500” without quotation marks constitutes plagiarism; it’s the repeated use of exact wording and sentence structure without any quotation marks. If, for example, you used just that one phrase without quotation marks—a phrase whose language isn’t particularly distinctive—and acknowledged the source of the ideas, that would be fine.

If quotation marks were placed around all material directly taken from Hoover, this paragraph would be so cluttered as to be unreadable. If you like the ideas and the wording of the original this much, if it is important to your paper, and if it is stated more concisely in the original than it would be in your paraphrase or summary, then quote the original.

C. The Mosaic

Intuition plays an important role in scientific progress. Thomas Kuhn believes that nonanalytical thought allows scientists to break through the logic of old theories to formulate new paradigms to explain a new reality. Copernicus’ invention of one such model (a reversal of the Ptolemaic view which reigned prior to 1500 claimed that the earth and planets rotate around the sun).

Note the underlined phrases which have been borrowed from the original and shifted around. Hoover’s structure has been modified to a certain extent by the writer, but numerous key phrases have been retained without quotation marks, and the source has not been credited.

D. A Legitimate Paraphrase

In “Zen: Technology and the Split Brain,” Hoover suggests that the power of intuition—that suprarational half of our intelligence—is more important to scientific advancement than the function of the left hemisphere of our brain—the rigidly logical and process-oriented portion. He cites the revolution in thinking created by Copernicus’ new paradigm of cosmic movement, a leap in understanding made possible only by the creative invention of “a new reality” after rational consideration of the old reality had exhausted itself (124).

Hoover’s ideas and specific language have been documented (by direct references to the author, by citations to his article, and by quotation marks where specific language has been used). Notice too that Hoover’s language and structure have been modified to fit this student-writer’s own purpose.

Introducing Quotations

Introduce a quotation by signaling that it is coming and perhaps by indicating your purpose in using it. You may name the title of the source and the author in a signal phrase: In her book *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Eisenstein warns against a “false universalism that addresses itself to all women.” Or you may wish to name only the author: In a discussion of Enlightenment political philosophy, Eisenstein asserts that while “liberal theory contested the divine right of monarchs and aristocrats to political rule... “women questioned the “divine” right of men to deny suffrage to half the population.”³ There are many graceful ways to integrate a quotation into your text, but try to keep in mind that quotations are confusing if they appear to “drop from the sky.”

Punctuating and Formatting Quotations

Short direct prose quotations should be incorporated into the text of the paper and enclosed in double quotation marks. For example: According to Jonathan Clarke, “Professional diplomats often say that trying to think diplomatically about foreign policy is a waste of time.”⁴

For a quotation within a quotation, use single quotation marks. For example: The new head of General Motors is cautiously optimistic about the influence the resurgent U.S. auto industry can have on the entire domestic economy, according to a recent *Time* magazine story. “All told, GM’s Smith estimates, the recovering industry is now strong enough to add 1 ½%—\$20 billion—to the nation’s gross domestic product in the last quarter of this year. ‘It’s been a long time, but you always thought of the U.S. auto industry as the engine of economic recoveries in the 1950s and ‘60s,’ says Smith. ‘I think we could be that kind of locomotive again.’”⁵

Quotations of four or more typewritten lines should be set off from your text in single spacing and indented in their entirety, generally 5 or 10 spaces from the left margin, with *no quotation marks or beginning or end*. (See the extended quotation on page 1 of this handout.) Rules about how many spaces to indent and about whether to single- or double-space extended quotations vary with different documentation systems; check the guidelines for the particular system you’re using.

Quotations of up to three lines of poetry should be integrated into your sentence. For example: In Julius Caesar, Antony begins his famous speech with “Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears: / I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him” (III.ii.75-76). Notice that a slash (/) with a space on either side is used to separate lines.

³ Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought: An Assessment* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), 43, 53.

⁴ “The Conceptual Poverty of U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Atlantic*, September 1993, 55.

⁵ William McWhirter, “Back on the Fast Track,” *Time*, 13 December 1993, 64.

More than three lines of poetry should be indented. As with any extended (indented) quotation, do not use quotation marks unless you need to indicate a quotation within your quotation.

Use an ellipsis (...) only when it is not obvious that you are quoting only a portion of the whole.

Within quotations, use square brackets [] (not parentheses) to add your own clarification, comment, or correction. For example, the material enclosed in square brackets in the following sentence was added to clarify the quotation: “He [Hamlet] changes significantly after seeing Fortinbras and his army.” Use [sic], which is Latin for “in this manner,” to indicate that a mistake or problem of some sort is in the original material you are quoting and is not a mistake you introduced in your transcription.

Place commas and period inside the closing quotation marks, but all other punctuation marks—such as semicolons, colons, exclamation points and question marks—go outside the closing quotation marks except when they are part of the quoted material.

For Further Information

For further information on summarizing and paraphrasing sources, see any of these books:

- Hairston, Maxine, and John J. Ruskiewicz. *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers*. 3rd ed. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.
- Hodges, John C., and Mary E. Whitten. *Harbrace College Handbook*. 11th ed. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990.
- Lunsford, Andrea, and Robert Connors. *The St. Martin's Handbook*. New York: St. Martin's 1989.
- Spatt, Brenda. *Writing from Sources*. 3rd ed. New York: St. Martin's, 1991.

For information about specific documentation systems, consult the guide for the system you're using. If you're not sure which documentation system to use, ask the course instructor who assigned your paper. The following are just a few of the most commonly used guides:

- American Medical Association, *Manual for Authors and Editors*
- Council of Biology Editors, *CBE Style Manual*
- The Chicago manual of Style*
- MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*
- Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*