



Writing evidence: Summaries, paraphrases and quotes

Why should I write evidence?

Whether writing an assignment or a workplace document, your aim is to convince your audience to agree with you. In order to do that, you will almost always need to support your work with credible evidence. Writing and explaining evidence also increases your understanding of a topic.

What is evidence?

'Information' becomes 'evidence' when you use it to support an argument.

Evidence is not all the information available on a topic. It's only the information that is relevant to your specific argument. To make an argument, you must also comment on or explain your evidence.

Writing evidence takes three main forms: summary, paraphrase and quote.

Writing evidence starts when you make notes from your source documents. Although not as polished as the final draft, effective notes are made up of summaries, paraphrases, and quotes, and your comments about them. To learn more about making notes for evidence, [download the PDF guide "Note-making for critical thinking"](#).

What are summaries, paraphrases and quotes?

First, read the source text below. Then, have a look at the examples on the next page, based on the source text. What differences do you notice between them?

Source text

If it is true, as we claim in this book, that to argue persuasively you need to be in dialogue with others, then summarizing others' arguments is central to your arsenal of basic moves. Because writers who make strong claims need to map their claims relative to those of other people, it is important to know how to summarize effectively what those other people say. (We're using the word "summarizing" here to refer to any information from others, that you present in your own words, including that which you paraphrase.)

Excerpt from page 30 of:

Graff, G., Birkenstein, C., & Durst, R. K. (2018). *They say / I say: The moves that matter in academic writing with readings* (4th ed.). W.W. Norton & Co.

Summary Example

Being able to summarise and paraphrase is essential for writing strong arguments that respond to the arguments of others (Graff, Birkenstein & Durst, 2018).

The summary above is very short and states only the main idea of the source text.

Reasons for summarising include:

- to present a range of ideas, for synthesis or discussion;
- when making notes.

Paraphrase Example

Graff, Birkenstein and Durst (2018) contend that being able to summarise and paraphrase from others' texts is a fundamental skill required to write a persuasive argument. They liken writing an argument to being in a conversation with other writers. When they use this comparison, it is logical to conclude that to argue convincingly a writer needs to respond to the arguments and claims of other writers, and thus must be able to demonstrate in summary or paraphrase what those other arguments and claims are.

This text does not merely restate the ideas in the original text. There are also comments about the ideas. Do you think the writer of the paraphrase above agrees or disagrees with the original text? Why do you think that?

Reasons for paraphrasing include:

- to discuss the source text in detail. For example, to clarify or explain something about it;
- to make detailed notes about a section for in-depth comment.

Quote Example

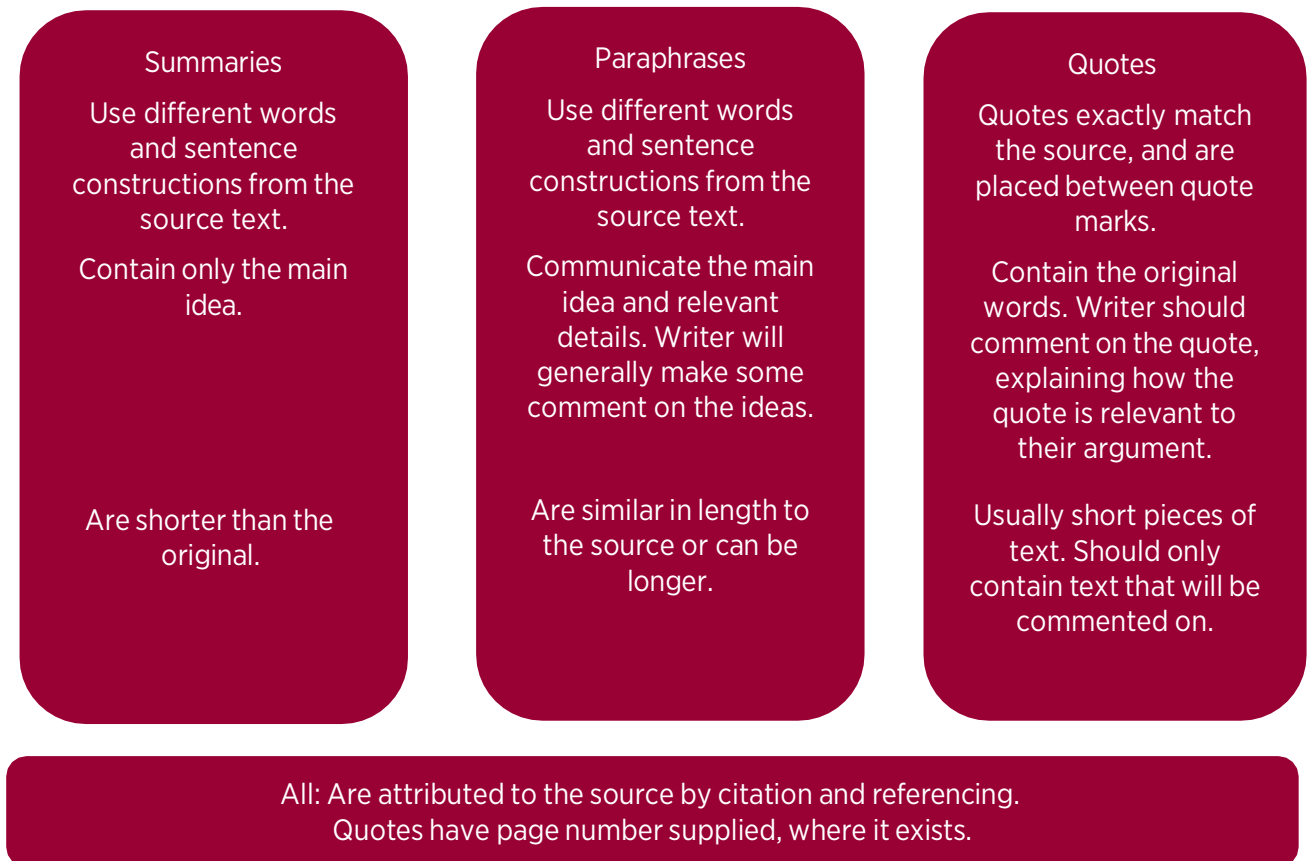
Graff, Birkenstein and Durst claim that "to argue persuasively you need to be in dialogue with others" (2018, p. 30) and that summarising is a way to achieve that. Their point is that a reader won't be convinced by a writer's argument unless the writer creates dialogue with others writing on the same topic. That is why developing skills in writing evidence is very important for academic writing.

There is more than just the quote here. The quote has been introduced and also explained, by stating what's important about the quote for the argument (that skills in writing evidence are important).

Reasons for quoting include:

- to comment on the words used in the source;
- the quote is from someone important in the field, and referring to their words gives authority to your idea;
- you need to quote the source for accuracy of information.

Features of summaries, paraphrases and quotes

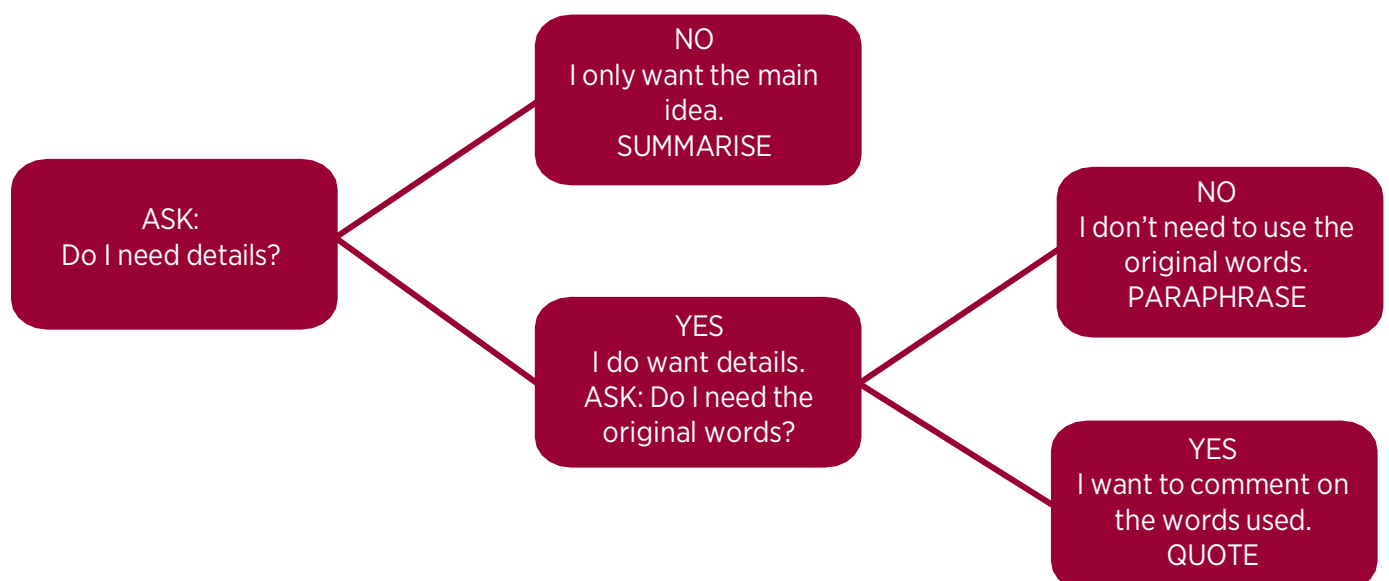


How do I choose between summarising, paraphrasing, and quoting?

Two main questions to ask when deciding which to use are:

1. How much detail?
2. Your words or theirs?

Your answers to these questions will depend on your PURPOSE for including the information from the source.



Getting started with paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is one of the more difficult academic skills. There is no one best way to paraphrase. Here are some simple steps to get you started.

1. Read the section of text, then cover it. Think about the meaning, not the words.

2. Write what you remember in dot points.

Writing in dot points helps you to write the meaning without using the same sentences as the source. If it's a long text, break it down into smaller parts.

3. Check your dot points

When you have written your dot points, check the source text for:

- Correct meaning.
- Words that need changing.
- Details that you have missed.

Don't change the specialist terms that are commonly used in the profession you are studying for.

4. Write your paraphrase

Use your dot points to write the information and ideas in your own way.

Congratulations, you have written a paraphrase.

For a more structured approach, [download the "Paraphrasing Tool" interactive PDF](#).

Tips for preventing common problems

1

Summarise the relevant information instead of looking in your readings for sentences that say what you want to say, and then rewriting them. Although new students often start out by rewriting individual sentences, it can lead to taking ideas out of context, and to accidentally plagiarising. Summarising gives you the 'bigger picture' and it's easier to write summaries in your own words.

2

When making notes, write whether it's a summary, paraphrase or quote. That way you won't accidentally use a quote thinking it was a summary or paraphrase.

3

Submit assignments before they are due and check your Turnitin Similarity Report. The report shows how much of your text matches other texts and you can rewrite as required. For more information, [view the video "Viewing and interpreting the Originality Report"](#).

4

Seek and use feedback on your evidence-writing skills while drafting your assessment. To get help with your assignments or browse 'how-to' guides, [visit the Study Smart website](#).

Next steps: Activity

Next time you are preparing to write an assignment, try these activities and tools. See what works for you.

Take a section from your readings and try summarising by writing the main ideas only. If you want a more structured approach, [download the “Reading Graphic Organiser” PDF](#).

Select a key part of your source text and write a paraphrase by following the steps described in the “Getting started with paraphrasing” section on page 4, or [download the “Paraphrasing Tool” interactive PDF](#).

Select a piece of your text suitable for quoting and then explain what the quote adds to your argument. If you cannot explain what the quote adds to the argument, then consider that you may not need to use that quote.

More resources

[Download the Study Smart PDF guide “Summarizing”.](#)

[Download the Study Smart PDF guide “Paraphrasing”](#)

[Download the Study Smart PDF guide “Quoting”.](#)