

Paraphrasing and Summarizing

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Why paraphrase or summarize?

Like direct quotations, paraphrasing and summarizing are ways to use the works of other authors to support, give depth to, or provide counterpoints to your writing.

They allow you to bring in another's ideas without breaking up the text of your paper with a lot of quotations.

Both paraphrasing and summarizing involve putting the ideas, thoughts, or research you have read from other authors into your own words instead of copying the original author's text word-for-word like you do in a direct quotation.

A strong paper will usually incorporate both direct quotations and paraphrased or summarized passages.

Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they actually have different meanings...

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing involves a point-by-point rephrasing of the original article to express a larger idea without altering the author's meaning. Your paraphrased passage should be close to the length of the original passage because you are not cutting down the original work.

Paraphrasing does not mean that you change a few words and keep everything else the same. A rephrasing should be a complete restating of the points, including a change in sentence structure as well as language or word choice.

Use when: You want to fully express the ideas of another author but do not want to use quotations.

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing involves condensing a large chunk of information into just a few lines. Essentially, you are just taking the most important points and highlighting them.

Use when: You only want to borrow a few important points from another author without using a direct quotation.

Let's look at an example.

We will paraphrase and summarize the same passage from the story *Little Red Riding Hood*:

(Note: This example is being used for explanatory purposes only. Folklore is usually considered to be common knowledge and does not need a citation)

Original Text by Lott Softales:

... “What big eyes you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to see you with, my dear,”

whispered the cunning wolf.

“What big ears you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to hear you with, my dear!”

“What big hands you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to hug you with, my dear” ...”

Incorrectly Paraphrased Passage:

...Little Red Riding asks why the wolf has such big eyes. The wolf says that he sees better with them. She then asks why the wolf has such big ears. The wolf says that he hears better with them. Next, Red Riding Hood asks why the wolf has such big hands. The wolf says they are better to hug with (Softales).

This paraphrased version is far too close to the original passage in sentence structure, organization, and language.

Original Text by Lott Softales:

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“The better to see you with, my dear,”
whispered the cunning wolf.

“What big ears you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to hear you with, my dear!”

“What big hands you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to hug you with, my dear” ...”

Correctly Paraphrased Passage Using MLA:

...Little Red Riding Hood notices the difference in appearance and questions why her grandmother’s eyes are so large feature by feature. The wolf assures her each time that there is a reason for each of the abnormalities – she can do a better job of seeing her, hearing her, and hugging her (Softales).

Note: The language and sentence structure of the paraphrased passage are very different from the original passage.

Original Text by Lott Softales:

... “What big eyes you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to see you with, my dear,”
whispered the cunning wolf.

“What big ears you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to hear you with, my dear!”

“What big hands you have, Grandmother!”

“The better to hug you with, my dear” ...”

Summarized Passage Using MLA:

Red Riding Hood questions why the wolf does not look like her grandmother and the wolf makes up excuses (Softales).

Note: Only the main point(s) of the passage are conveyed.

“Why should I cite paraphrased or summarized passages?”

They are in my own words.”

1. Plagiarism:

Whether you are directly quoting, summarizing, or paraphrasing another's work, that author still deserves the credit for the ideas you are using.

You cannot say that the ideas are your own when all you did was reword the ideas of another.

Remember that plagiarism is not necessarily about words, but about ideas. You can put anything in your own words but that does not make it your idea.

2. Credibility:

Citing provides support for your statements. You are not going to be a scholar on every topic you write a paper on. You need to refer to experts to let your readers know that you have done the appropriate research and that they can trust what they are reading.

Using the *Little Red Riding Hood* example again: If you wrote down that a woodcutter saved a girl from a wolf and you saw it with your own eyes, I might not believe you. However, if you paraphrased a journal article from a prominent wildlife biologist who said he/she was there and observed the events, then I would be much more inclined to take you at your word.

3. Breadcrumbs:

Your audience may want to do further reading on the ideas you bring up in your paper. By citing your information, you are leaving your readers a path back your original sources.

Using the *Little Red Riding Hood* example, if I am writing a book on animal attacks, then I may want to read more about this incident that you have mentioned in your paper as material for my own work.

Or, if I still doubt the credibility of the story you have paraphrased, I can hunt down the journal article for myself and confirm what you have written.

Common Knowledge:

You have a certain fact (the sky is blue) or a general idea (wolves can be dangerous to humans) that you are going to put in your paper. You then find that fact or common knowledge in the text that you are using as a source for your paper.

Do you cite the information because it is in your source even though it is a “fact” or “common knowledge”?

Will you be accused of paraphrasing/summarizing without citation if you do not?

Common Knowledge:

Common knowledge is a term applied to any bit of information that is known by wide group or community of people.

It is generally accepted that anything in the realm of “common knowledge” can go without citation but first you need to determine if your fact or general idea is common knowledge.

This can be tricky to determine.

Try to follow these guidelines:

- Because common knowledge relies on the knowledge of a certain group or community, it will vary depending upon your audience.

When writing for an advanced panel on physics, you may not need to cite basic laws of physics, whereas if you were writing for a beginning science class, you might well need to cite that same information.

Ask yourself: Should my audience know this information without needing to consult another source?

Try to follow these guidelines:

- Sometimes facts do not need citations. A well-known or widely accepted fact (Columbus sailed in 1492, $a^2+b^2=c^2$, etc.), can go without a citation.
- Ideas almost always need citation unless they are so basic that they would occur to any of your readers or they are logical opinions or inferences that you drew yourself. Example: Obesity is an epidemic.
- When in doubt, cite. Never put yourself in a position to be accused of plagiarism.

How to use a paraphrased or summarized passage in your paper:

If paraphrasing is a point-by-point reworking of an author's ideas and summarizing is a condensing of another's ideas, your own ideas should come before and after a paraphrased or summarized passage in order to explain to your reader how it relates to your thesis.

Example: Let us say that the thesis of your paper is “Many fairy tales were used as cautionary tales to warn young girls away from impropriety.”

Your paper should look something like this:

In *Little Red Riding Hood*, the wolf is not depicted as a savage animal but as a liar and deceiver. **Little Red Riding Hood questions: why her grandmother’s eyes are so big; why her ears are so big; why her hands are so big. The wolf assures her each time that there is a reason for each of the abnormalities – she can do a better job of seeing her, hearing her, and hugging her (Softales).** It is not enough just to attack her. He lies to her first to get her close enough so that he can easily gobble her up. Her naivety is what will lead her to her end. This represents the idea that bad things happen to a girl who is easily tricked.

Red = The paraphrased passage from your source. White = Your ideas.

Still having some trouble with paraphrasing or summarizing? Contact the library!

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