

EFFECTIVE QUOTES, PARAPHRASES, AND SUMMARIES

USING QUOTATIONS EFFECTIVELY

When should you quote?

1. When the author's exact language will support your ideas better than a paraphrase or summary of the information.
2. When the language is striking or highly nuanced, allowing for multiple interpretations that you need to demonstrate for your readers.
3. If you plan to spend time analyzing the quotation in your own text.
4. When you need to demonstrate what other people feel or think about a subject.
5. When the words come from highly respected authorities and speak directly to one of your main points.

How do you quote?

1. Read the source carefully to understand the context of the words you are thinking of quoting.
2. Copy the quotation exactly, making sure to transfer the words, capitalization, punctuation, and even any errors in the source. If the source author has quoted someone else, enclose that quotation in a pair of single quotation marks. Enclose the entire quotation you're using in a pair of double quotation marks.
3. Check the quotation against the source word by word to make sure they match exactly.
4. Do not insert any other words into the quotation unless you enclose them in brackets.
5. Document the quotation fully, including page numbers or URLs.

USING PARAPHRASES EFFECTIVELY

When should you paraphrase?

1. When you need to discuss details from the source material rather than just the main ideas found in a summary.
2. When the author's ideas and facts are more important than the language used to describe them or when a quotation might be distracting.
3. When the original text uses language that differs greatly in style, tone, or voice from your writing.
4. When the language of the original is technical, arcane, or complicated.

How do you paraphrase?

1. Read the part of the source you want to paraphrase several times, until you are sure you understand not only its ideas but also its tone and emphasis.
2. Find the key terms and think of synonyms you could use instead. If you must quote a key term, enclose the quotation in a pair of quotation marks and note the number of the page on which it appears.
3. Write the ideas in your own words, using a tone of voice that is similar to the source's. Be sure that you emphasize the same ideas or examples the author did.
4. Check the draft against the source, and rewrite it as needed until it accurately represents the original. Be careful not to use the source's language.
5. Check to be sure you haven't included your own ideas or opinions in the paraphrase.
6. Document the paraphrase with the author's name, the title of the work, and publishing information, including page numbers or URLs.



USING SUMMARIES EFFECTIVELY

When should you write a summary?

1. When a quotation or paraphrase would give unneeded detail or distracting minutiae.
2. When several different kinds of information from the same source and author were provided over many pages in the original.

How do you write a summary?

1. Read and reread the original until you are sure you understand it.
2. Identify the major ideas: the thesis statement, if there is one, and the topic sentences of paragraphs or sections. If the work is a narrative, write a very brief description of the major events in each section. If the work is very short, look for key ideas in repeated phrases. Annotate the pages if necessary to track the information.
3. Write one sentence that captures the main idea of the original. Rewrite the sentence as necessary until it works. Then write any supporting sentences that are needed so that your readers will grasp the major idea. Rewrite them until you have a summary that someone unfamiliar with the work will understand.
4. Check the summary against the source to make sure you have used all your own words. If you need to use any phrases from the source because they are unique, enclose the phrases in a pair of quotation marks. Note the page number of the material you have quoted.
5. Check to be sure you have not included your own thoughts and opinions in the summary. The summary should include only the source's ideas, not yours.
6. Document your summary with the author's name, title of the work, and publishing information, including page numbers or URLs.

Descriptive vs. Informative Summary

A **descriptive summary** explains the source from a reader's perspective, like a blow-by-blow description of what an author writes or what people do. It focuses on action. Descriptive summaries are most useful when the focus of your own writing is on something that has happened and the event is noteworthy in itself. They are useful for analysis and argument because they allow you to focus on another writer's act—what he or she has said, why, and how.

Faulkner begins his novel Absalom, Absalom! with a two-page-long sentence.

An **informative summary** provides the content of a source in highly condensed form. It might be useful if you are writing to an audience that needs some background information, or when you need to provide a context for later analysis, such as a plot summary at the start of a film review. Informative summaries are somewhat like the abstracts that you often see at the beginning of scholarly articles. They help an audience learn enough about a subject so that they can understand your argument or analysis.

Miss Coldfield knows from the very start why Quentin Compson has decided to go to Harvard.

Adapted from "Chapter 17: Using Information Effectively," in *The Thomson Handbook, Instructor's Edition*, eds. David Blakesley and Jeffrey L. Hoogveen (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008).