When to Summarize, Paraphrase, and Quote

Summarizing

Summaries are significantly shorter than the original material, and they take a broad overview of the source material as a whole. Summary must be cited with in-text citations and on your reference page.

Summarize when:

• You want to establish background or offer an overview of a topic
• You want to describe knowledge (from several sources) about a topic
• You want to determine the main ideas of a single source

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is stating an idea or passage in your own words. You must significantly change the wording, phrasing, and sentence structure (not just a few words here and there) of the source. These also must be noted with in-text citations and the reference page.

Paraphrase when:

• You want to clarify a short passage from a text
• You want to avoid overusing quotations
• You want to explain a point when exact wording isn’t important
• You want to explain the main points of a passage
• You want to report numerical data or statistics (preferred in APA papers)

Quoting

Quotations are the exact words of an author, copied directly from a source, word for word. Quotations must appear with quotation marks, and they need to be cited with in-text citations and on the reference page.

Use quotations when:

• You want to add the power of an author’s words to support your argument
• You want to disagree with an author’s argument
• You want to highlight particularly eloquent or powerful phrases or passages
• You are comparing and contrasting specific points of view
• You want to note the important research that precedes your own

Last updated 6/12/2014