



Paraphrasing & Summarising

Tips for quoting, paraphrasing and summarising (or how to avoid plagiarising)

There are 3 ways to incorporate the work of others into your work:

1. **Quote** using exactly their words and punctuation in quotation marks (< ~ 40 words) or indented text block (> ~ 40 words)
2. **Paraphrase** their key ideas. See explanation and example below.
3. **Summarise** the work of one or more authors. See explanation below.

These are the things you can do to ensure you represent the work of others correctly:

- Be sure to record details of all your sources accurately (books, web pages, journal articles etc.)
- Always view the original source before using it as a reference - 'sight before you cite.'
- Acknowledge (cite) a quotation, even if the quotation is only a few words.
- Cite the information sources you use (e.g. books, articles, websites).
- Make it easy for your reader to find and follow your sources
- Become proficient with your departmental reference style (APA, Harvard, Chicago etc.).
- Manage your references with software programs like EndNote or Zotero, and talk with your Departmental Liaison Librarian (ask in your department for contact details).

Paraphrasing and summarising

It is important to find the balance between your voice and the voice of others. Both are important in any piece of academic writing. A well-balanced essay, for example, will contain a mix of your thinking and analysis and the work of others to support your arguments. Integrating the work of others into your own work involves two essential skills: paraphrasing and summarising.

Paraphrasing

To paraphrase means to put in your own words something said or written by someone else. This is an important skill to acquire in university writing, as a lot of what you write will be based on various source materials. Paraphrasing is necessary also to avoid using too many direct quotations, which can give the impression that the writer does not sufficiently understand the topic to form an opinion. Paraphrased information must always reference the original source and should not be too close to the original wording, either in vocabulary or sentence structure, otherwise it could be considered plagiarism even if a reference is included.

Paraphrasing takes practice. Here is one approach to paraphrasing that will help you to develop your understanding of the material and help you to avoid inadvertently plagiarising the work of others:

1. Hide the source material and ask yourself, 'what were they saying/describing/explaining?'
2. Write down your answer, no matter how jumbled or rough.

3. Once you are happy that you have captured the key ideas, edit your answer until the text is clear and concise.
4. Check your answer against the original to ensure you have captured the meaning but not expressed it in the same way.

Sometimes the material you want or need to use in your work may be difficult to paraphrase. Here is an example:

“Semi-structured interviews with eight choristers and choir leaders from cathedrals, universities and conservatoires were carried out” (Crotchet and Minim, 2009, p. 22).

The sentence is dense with information, and it is hard to think of reasonable alternatives to most of the words in the sentence.

To deal with this issue, think about how much of the detail you really need, and why. For example, the key point of the reference above could be the small size of the study, or the fact that it is qualitative. So, words like “size” or “qualitative” suggest a sentence about the source quite different from the original, and one that can now be linked into the discussion. Similarly, if the nature of the choirs is more pertinent to your argument than whether participants are members of the choir or lead the choir, emphasise this in your paraphrase like this:

Crotchet and Minim (2009) conducted a small, qualitative study with participants selected from both religious and secular choirs....

Another option, if you have found several sources which reach similar conclusions, is to make a general point and group the references like this:

It is generally acknowledged that there is a shortage of capable male bass voices in New Zealand choirs (Crotchet & Minim, 2009; Quaver & Quaver, 2012; Breve, Minim & Quaver, 2011).

Finally, if there is a really crucial piece of information that you must reproduce, and you are worried about paraphrasing it (perhaps because it uses a very technical vocabulary) a brief quotation might be the answer. However, beware of extensive reliance on quotes as this may give the impression that you do not sufficiently understand the topic.

Summarising

Is a way of presenting an overview of a piece of writing. A summary provides the main ideas from the original text, but leaves out the details or examples given by the author. As with paraphrasing, take great care to ensure you do not duplicate wording from the original author and always reference the original work. Here is an example where material from a single source is summarised:

Original source, quote A, Ecotourism NZ (2008):

... the lack of a precise, commonly agreed definition of 'ecotourism' was a common cause of misunderstanding, argument, and made many doubt that it was a genuine topic in itself (as something significantly different from, for example, adventure or nature tourism or, more importantly, sustainable tourism).

Original source, quote B, Ecotourism NZ(2008):

An examination of the literature shows that this problem is not confined to the West Coast, and that there are literally hundreds of definitions of ecotourism. The fact is that people tend to customize their own definitions to suit their interests or situation.

Summary of A and B:

Unfortunately, New Zealand has no definitive interpretation of "ecotourism" so people are able to use the term to suit their own purposes leading to misunderstanding and confusion (Ecotourism NZ, 2008).

Paraphrasing and summarising are essential skills for academic writing. If you can paraphrase and summarise the work of others this will:

- Demonstrate that you understand the material you have read and are writing about
- Help you to take written information and integrate it into your own work
- Demonstrate your writing skills
- Enable you to use other people's ideas to back up your own ideas
- Help to ensure you avoid plagiarising

It is worth reviewing the University of Otago website for advice on academic integrity and plagiarism at this link: <https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/academicintegrity>

If you are concerned about any aspect of your academic writing, paraphrasing, summarising or referencing, please contact the Student Learning Development and make an appointment:

hedc.studentlearning@otago.ac.nz or www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/students/talk .