

Rules in Writing – Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Citing: *How to Write Honestly, Creatively, and Without Getting Into Trouble*

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Preface

It is exceedingly easy to get yourself into trouble when you write. With one too many intentional or accidental mistakes, the line between honest academic or professional writing and plagiarism moves closer and closer to the point where your assignment grade, course grade, or future in your program is threatened. You are well served to keep the line as far away from you as possible and to always be honest in your writing, attribution, and contribution.

Below is a brief guide on quoting, paraphrasing, and citing, particularly from Internet-based documents, as so many of us use these days. This is not a complete guide, but it is enough to keep you on track. When in doubt about what is proper and professional, ask your instructor. This is one case where it is *not* better to ask forgiveness, rather than permission. On the same note, I recommend that you purchase a style manual, such as that of the American Psychological Association, which should be available in the campus bookstore, or from any online book dealer.

The below is written in question and answer format. As such, this is a fluid document. Please share any additional questions so that this document can remain as complete and useful as possible.

Quoting

➤ **What is the purpose of quoting a source document?**

Generally, you can quote a source document if there is particularly unique or revealing language that helps you make your point, or if there is a bloc of sentences that provides background information relevant to your analysis or review.

➤ **Is there a limit to how long a single quote should be in my paper?**

There is no set rule on this matter. However, use your good judgment. A quote that runs longer than 3 or 4 sentences might be too long, particularly if you have it set in a paper of less than 10 pages. If you want to provide an excerpt longer than 3 or 4 sentences, you might consider creating a text box separate from the body of your narrative. Generally, though, this is not a good practice.

➤ **How should I format a longer quote?**

For a quote that runs 3, 4 or more sentences, you should set it apart from your paragraph and italicize it, as such:

Quotations that are longer than 1 or 2 sentences should be set apart from the text like this. This does two things: (1) it shows that you are quoting from another source (and so you should provide page numbers as a citation), (2) it highlights the importance of the selected passage.

➤ **When should I not quote?**

Your default writing style should be to write using your own language. Rather than quoting a source, try to interpret the source and capture the main point. You should not quote if your source is quoting another source – don't quote a quote. Always seek out the original source, so that you can determine for yourself whether the original material is relevant to your work. If you paraphrase a quote from a source document, you should note that the secondary source is taken out of its original context.

Paraphrasing

➤ **What is the purpose of paraphrasing a source document?**

If one of your sources provides information that is useful for your own work but you realize you shouldn't quote extensively, you might consider paraphrasing.

➤ **How should I paraphrase?**

There are two ways of paraphrasing, one of which is good; one of which can lead to trouble. The first is the interpretive/theme extraction approach. Here you read the source, reflect on it a bit, perhaps combine your reflection with thoughts on another source, and you write, in your own words, what the key ideas are from select passages. The second is the selectively changing a few words approach. This approach will get you into trouble. With this approach, you take a sentence or passage and change a few key words so as to avoid a direct quote.

You will find that if you use the former approach, which I don't like to think of as paraphrasing necessarily, you will have a much more enjoyable time with your writing. It might be intellectually more challenging, but it is less tedious than figuring out what words to change.

➤ **When should I paraphrase?**

If you find yourself selectively changing words you should actively consider directly quoting the source. If, at that time, you find you are using direct quotes for the majority of your paper, then you probably are at risk of submitting work that is not at all original. A document that consists of mostly selectively changed words, particularly without full citation, including page numbers, is much like a document that consists of mostly direct quotes. Such work-submissions will be taken very seriously, and your grade, and perhaps future in the program, might suffer. Note that citation won't solve your problem if you have a document that is patched together with selectively changed words. This would still be considered poor writing, and, probably, poor research.

Citation

➤ **When do I have to cite a source?**

The short answer is: whenever you actively use a document to make your writing complete. Cite sources when you use their insights, data, or themes, either when you directly quote, interpret, or paraphrase. Give credit where it is due!

➤ **I know I have to cite when I use a source's insights, data, or themes. Sometimes I forget, or I lose track of the source in my notes when I am conducting my research.**

Well organized writing and research practices can keep you out of trouble. A good practice that I have adopted when conducting research is to provide full citation in my notebook. As I read various sources I have my notebook open, and I summarize and extract the key themes from the source. At that time I fully cite the source. If my notes include a direct quote, I put quotation marks around the relevant section, and I note the page number. If you do this, when you come to writing your final paper, you will not need stacks of books and articles around you. Rather, you will just need your notebook, which contains all the necessary information.

➤ **If I am using APA style for citation, what information do I include in an in-text citation?**

The purpose of the in-text citation is to provide the necessary information so that the reader can easily find the full reference in your references page, at the end of the document.

For a source with an author: (*author last name, year of publication*).

For a source without an author but an organization: (*organization name, year of publication*).

For a source without an author or an organization: (*first few words of document title, year of publication*).

For a direct quote, use either of the above variations, plus: (*author year, pg. #*).

For an Internet document, use the same variations as above. When you don't have a page number for a direct quote, use a paragraph number. The goal is to allow the reader to easily go and see the original quote for him or herself.

➤ **If I am using APA style citation, what information do I provide in my references page?**

Whereas the in-text citation should allow the reader to find the full reference in the references section of your paper, the reference should allow the reader to access the original document. Not providing all the necessary information for the reader to access the document is like giving a visitor in town a road map with the origin and destination marked, along with only the main highways connecting the two, rather than the local streets that are necessary once the driver is off the highway. The same applies for MLA citations, though format is different.

Generally, you need to provide the following information:

For a book: author last name, author first name. (Year of publication). *Title of book*. Publication city: Publisher.

For a book chapter: author last name, author first name. (Year of publication). "Title of Article". In *Title of Book*, edited by Editor's Name. Publication city: Publisher, page numbers of the chapter.

For an article in a journal: author last name, author first name. (Year of publication). "Title of Article". *Title of Journal*, Vol. #(Issue #): page numbers.

For an Internet document (with an author): author last name, author first name. (Year of document if known). "Title of document". Complete website address written as <http://www.website.com/location.html>. Accessed on date.

For an Internet document (without an author): organization/website name. (Year of document if known). "Title of document or web page". Complete website address written as <http://www.website.com/location.html>. Accessed on date.

If you are referencing a website, you need to provide the URL for the document or page itself. It is insufficient for you to provide the "home" or index page for

the site. The precise location is akin to local streets; the home page is like a highway. Your job is to get the reader to the final destination.

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