# SUMMARIZING, PARAPHRASING, AND QUOTING

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Working with sources requires different levels of engagement with the information and ideas presented by them. How you should handle sources will depend on the assignment and often the conventions of the discipline within which you are writing. Regardless of whether or not you are summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, all sources you use must be acknowledged in-text and at the end of your paper. Here are some common moves for working with sources, and some guidance for when each move might be appropriate:

**When to Summarize:** Summaries are broad overviews of the source material and are significantly shorter than the original. In general, they answer what the work on the whole is "about." Summarize when:

- **You want to establish background information or offer an overview of a topic.**
- **You want to synthesize knowledge (from several sources) about a topic.** Synthesis means "to bring together." When you have several sources that present the same or similar ideas or information, summarizing them together can be a helpful way of addressing many sources at once. This is common in literature reviews in the natural and social sciences.
- **You want to condense the main ideas of a single source.** Summaries of this kind often foreground more involved work with that source that will come later in the essay.

**When to Paraphrase:** Paraphrasing is stating an idea in your own words. Paraphrasing is a common mode for the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. You'll want to paraphrase when specific information, data, or claims put forth in the source is of the utmost importance. If the general idea of the work is more important, you'll want to summarize (see above). If the specific way an idea is said is important, you'll want to quote (see below). You must significantly change the wording, phrasing, and sentence structure of the source (not just a few words). Paraphrase when:

- **You want to clarify a short passage from a text.** Paraphrasing allows you to emphasize the important elements of the passage, which often makes analysis of that passage easier.
- **You want to explain someone's claim but the exact wording is not important.** If powerful language is important, then you'll probably want to quote (see below). If the idea, rather than specific language, is what is important, paraphrasing is most appropriate.
- **You want to explain the main points of a passage.** While in a summary you might state the main points, paraphrasing helps you clarify and illuminate the main points.
- **You want to report numerical data or statistics.** When data are involved, you always want to deliver and explain them by paraphrasing the information for your reader. This will make arguing for their significance easier.
- You want to avoid overusing quotations. Variation is the spice of life!

**When to Quote:** Quotations are the exact words of an author, copied directly from a source, word for word, surrounded by quotation marks. The social and natural sciences privilege paraphrasing over quotation because the individual ideas are more important than the language with which those ideas are delivered. Quotation is very common in the humanities, especially in the study of literature, where texts are often the objects of study. You should quote when:

- **You want to highlight particularly eloquent or powerful phrases or passages.** Specific, powerful, persuasive language is worth quoting when you want to highlight the effect of this kind of language.
- **You want to add the power of an author's words to support your argument.** Quotation allows you to take on or borrow another's powerful phrases (so long as you give credit!).
- **You want to disagree with an author's argument.** Quotation can be a great way to show difference between your ideas and another's by making the contrast physically present in your paper.

# USING SIGNAL PHRASES:
# COMMON WAYS OF WORKING WITH SOURCES

The ways in which you introduce, follow, and discuss your summarized, paraphrased, or quoted source will help indicate your take on the ideas you've just cited. We call these moves "signal phrases," since they signal your position for the reader.

### *Indicating an Author's Perspective:*

X (acknowledges, agrees, claims, demonstrates, emphasizes, suggests) that _____.
X (admits, argues, believew, complains, concedes, reveals) that _____.

### *Introducing a Quotation:*

According to X, "_____."
X, a noted educator, claims, "_____."
In her book, X maintains that "_____."
In X's view, "_____."

### *Explaining Quotations:*

In other words, X believes _____.
In making this comment, X is suggesting that _____.
The essence of X's argument is that _____.
X's point is that _____.

### *Disagreeing, with reasons:*

X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.
X's claims that _____ is based on the assumption that _____, however _____.
By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of _____.
X's argument is contradictory. On one hand, he argues _____. On the other, he says _____.

### *Agreeing, with a difference:*

X's claim about _____ is useful because it sheds insight on the problem of _____.
X points out that _____. As a result, we have to reconsider _____.
X is right that _____, but he doesn't consider _____.
I agree that _____, a point that needs emphasizing because _____.

### *Establishing why your claims matter:*

Although few people have discussed _____, it is important because _____.
Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____.
My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger mtter of _____.
It might be easy to overlook _____, but it is important to acknowledge that _____.

Models here have been adapted from *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein.