Composition I: Join the Conversation

COMPOSITION I: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Lexi Stuckey

CONTENTS

PART I

USING SOURCES APPROPRIATELY

1

QUOTING, SUMMARIZING, AND PARAPHRASING

Shane Abrams

Adapted by Liz Delf, Rob Drummond, and Kristy Kelly

Finding Your Position, Posture, and Perspective

As you begin drafting your research essay, remember the conversation analogy: by using other voices, you are entering into a discussion that is much bigger than just you, even bigger than the authors you cite. However, what you have to say is important, so you are bringing together your ideas with others' ideas from a unique interpretive standpoint. Although it may take you a while to find it, you should be searching for your unique position in a complex network of discourse.

A marker and a thought bubble by Cup of Couple / Pexels

Here are a few questions to ask yourself as you consider this:

- How would I introduce this topic to someone who is completely unfamiliar?
- What are the major viewpoints on this topic? Remember that very few issues have only two sides.
- With which viewpoints do I align? With which viewpoints do I disagree? Consider agreement ("Yes"), disagreement ("No"), and qualification ("Yes, but…").
- What did I know about this issue before I began researching? What have I learned so far?
- What is my rhetorical purpose for this project? If your purpose is to argue a position, be sure that you feel comfortable with the terms and ideas discussed in the previous section on argumentation.

Situating Yourself Using Your Research

While you're drafting, be diligent and deliberate with your use of other people's words, ideas, and perspectives. Foreground your thesis (even if it's still in progress), and use paraphrases, direct quotes, and summary in the background to explain, support, complicate, or contrast your perspective.

Depending on the work you've done to this point, you may have a reasonable body of quotes, summaries, and paraphrases that you can draw from. Whether or not you've been collecting evidence throughout your research process, be sure to return to the original sources to ensure the accuracy and efficacy of your quotes, summaries, and paraphrases.

Quoting

A direct quote uses quotation marks (" ") to indicate where you're borrowing an author's words verbatim in your own writing. Use a direct quote if someone else wrote or said something in a distinctive or particular way and you want to capture their words exactly.

Direct quotes are good for establishing *ethos* and providing evidence. Quoting is a good choice when *how* something is said matters; it gives readers a sense of the tone, style, and perspective of the original source.

In a humanities essay, you will be expected to use some direct quotes; however, too many direct quotes can overwhelm your thesis and actually undermine your sense of *ethos.* Your research paper should strike a balance between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing—and articulating your own perspective!

Summarizing

Summarizing refers to the action of boiling down an author's ideas into a shorter version in your own words. Summary demonstrates your understanding of a text, but it also can be useful in giving background information or making a complex idea more accessible.

Paraphrasing

When we paraphrase, we are processing information or ideas from another person's text and putting them in our own words. The main difference between paraphrase and summary is scope: if summarizing means rewording and condensing, then paraphrasing means rewording without drastically altering length. However, paraphrasing is also generally more faithful to the spirit of the original; whereas a summary requires you to process and invites your own perspective, a paraphrase ought to mirror back the original idea using your own language.

Paraphrasing is helpful for establishing background knowledge or general consensus, simplifying a complicated idea, or reminding your reader of a certain part of another text. It is also valuable when relaying statistics or historical information, both of which are usually more fluidly woven into your writing when spoken with your own voice.

Whether you are quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing, you must always include an appropriate citation.

Each of these three tactics should support your argument: you should integrate quotes, paraphrases, and summary with your own writing. Below, you can see three examples of these tools. Consider how the direct quote, paraphrase, and summary could each be used to achieve different purposes:

> It has been suggested (again rather anecdotally) that giraffes do communicate using infrasonic vocalizations (the signals are verbally described to be similar—in structure and function—to the low-frequency, infrasonic "rumbles" of elephants). It was further speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production. Moreover, particular neck movements (e.g. the neck stretch) are suggested to be associated with the production of infrasonic vocalizations. (Baotic et al. 3)

Table 25.1 Illustrating different ways of referencing sources within a text

Style of Reference	Example
Quote	Some zoological experts have pointed out that the evidence for giraffe hums has been "rather anecdotally" reported (Baotic et al. 3). However, some scientists have "speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production" (3).
Paraphrase	Giraffes emit a low-pitch noise; some scientists believe that this hum can be used for communication with other members of the social group, but others are skeptical because of the dearth of research on giraffe noises. According to Baotic et al., the anatomy of the animal suggests that they may be making deliberate and specific noises (3).
Summary	Baotic et al. conducted a study on giraffe hums in response to speculation that these noises are used deliberately for communication.

There are infinite ways to bring evidence into your discussion. For now, let's revisit a formula that many students find productive as they find their footing in research writing:

front-load + quote/paraphrase/summarize + (cite) + explain/elaborate/analyze

Table 25.2 The front load + formula expounded upon

Variable	Elaboration
Front-load + *(1–2 sentences)*	Set your reader up for the quote using a signpost (also known as a "signal phrase"). Don't drop quotes in abruptly: by front-loading, you can guide your reader's interpretation.
Quote/ paraphrase/ summarize +	Use whichever technique is relevant to your rhetorical purpose at that exact point.
(Cite) +	Use an in-text citation appropriate to your discipline. It doesn't matter if you quote, paraphrase, or summarize—all three require a citation.
Explain, elaborate, analyze *(2–3 sentences)*	Perhaps most importantly, you need to make the value of this evidence clear to the reader. What does it mean? How does it further your thesis?

This might feel formulaic and forced at first, but following these steps will ensure that you give each piece of evidence thorough attention.

What might this look like in practice?

[1] Humans and dolphins are not the only mammals with complex systems of communication. As a matter of fact, [2] some scientists have "speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production" ([3] Baotic et al. 3). [4] Even though no definitive answer has been found, it's possible that the structure of a giraffe's head allows it to create sounds that humans may not be able to hear. This hypothesis supports the notion that different species of animals develop a sort of "language" that corresponds to their anatomy.

1. Front-load

Humans and dolphins are not the only mammals with complex systems of communication. As a matter of fact,

2. Quote

some scientists have "speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production"

3. Cite

(Baotic et al. 3).

4. Explain/elaborate/analyze

Even though no definitive answer has been found, it's possible that the structure of a giraffe's head allows it to create sounds that humans may not be able to hear. This hypothesis supports the notion that different species of animals develop a sort of "language" that corresponds to their anatomy.

Extended Quotes

A quick note on block quotes: sometimes you may find it necessary to use a long direct quote from a source. For instance, if there is a passage that you plan to analyze in-depth or throughout the course of the entire paper, you may need to reproduce the whole thing. You may have seen other authors use block quotes in the course of your research. In the middle of a sentence or paragraph, the text will break into a long direct quote that is indented and separated from the rest of the paragraph.

There are occasions when it is appropriate for you to use block quotes too, but they are rare. Even though long quotes can be useful, quotes long enough to block are often too long. Using too much of one source all at once can overwhelm your own voice and analysis, distract the reader, undermine your *ethos,* and prevent you from digging into a quote. It's typically a better choice to

- abridge (omit words from the beginning or end of the quote or from the middle using an ellipsis […]),
- break up (split one long quote into two or three shorter quotes that you can attend to more specifically), or
- paraphrase a long quote, especially because that gives you more space for the last step of the formula above.

If, in the rare event that you must use a long direct quote, one that runs more than four lines on a properly formatted page, follow the guidelines from the appropriate style guide. In MLA format, block quotes (1) are indented one inch from the margin, (2) are double-spaced, (3) are not in quotation marks, and (4) use original end punctuation and an in-text citation after the last sentence. The paragraph will continue after the block quote without any indentation.

Readerly Signposts

Signposts are phrases and sentences that guide a reader's interpretation of the evidence you are about to introduce. Readerly signposts are also known as "signal phrases" because they give the reader a warning of your next move. In addition to foreshadowing a paraphrase, quote, or summary, though, your signposts can be active agents in your argumentation.

Before using a paraphrase, quote, or summary, you can prime your reader to understand that evidence in a certain way. For example, let's take the imaginary quote "The moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."

- [X] insists, "The moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
- Some people believe, naïvely, that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
- Common knowledge suggests that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
- [X] posits that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
- Although some people believe otherwise, the truth is that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
- Although some people believe that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick," it is more likely that…
- Whenever conspiracy theories come up, people like to joke that "the moon landing was faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."
- The government has conducted many covert operations in the last century: "The moon landing was

faked in a sound studio by Stanley Kubrick."

What does each signpost do to us, as readers, encountering the same quote?

The original chapter, Interacting with Sources by Shane Abrams, is from EmpoWord: A Student-Centered Anthology and Handbook for College Writers

Works Cited

Baotic, Anton, Florian Sicks, and Angela S. Stoeger. "Nocturnal 'Humming' Vocalizations: Adding a Piece of the Puzzle of Giraffe Vocal Communication." *BioMed Central Research Notes*, vol. 8, no. 425, 2015, pp. 1–11.

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SUMMARIZING AND PARAPHRASING

Have you ever heard, "the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else"?

Writing a summary of a source is a very similar process to teaching someone the content—but in this case, the student you're teaching is yourself.

Summarizing, or condensing someone else's ideas and putting it into your own shortened form, allows you to be sure that you've accurately captured the main idea of the text you're reading. When reading, summarizing is helpful for checking your understanding of a longer text and remembering the author's main ideas. When writing, summarizing is critical when reviewing, writing an abstract, preparing notes for a study guide, creating an annotated bibliography, answering essay questions, recording results of an experiment, describing the plot of a fictional work or film, or writing a research paper.

A person holding a pen by Cottonbro Studio / Pexels

How to Write Summary Statements

Use these processes to help you write summary statements:

- Underline important information and write keywords in the margin.
- Record ideas using a two-column note-taking system. Record questions you have about the text concepts in the left column and answers you find in the reading in the right column.
- Identify how concepts relate to what you already know.
- Add examples and details

For retaining key ideas as you read, write a summary statement at the end of each paragraph or section. For capturing the major ideas of the entire work, write a summary paragraph (or more) that describes the entire text.

Tips for Summary

For longer, overall summary projects that capture an entire reading, consider these guidelines for writing a summary:

- **A summary should contain the main thesis or standpoint of the text, restated in your own words.** (To do this, first find the thesis statement in the original text.)
- **A summary is written in your own words.** It contains few or no quotes.
- **A summary is always shorter than the original text, often about 1/3 as long as the original.** It is the ultimate fat-free writing. An article or paper may be summarized in a few sentences or a couple of paragraphs. A book may be summarized in an article or a short paper. A very large book may be summarized in a smaller book.
- **A summary should contain all the major points of the original text**, and should ignore most of the fine details, examples, illustrations or explanations.
- **The backbone of any summary is formed by crucial details** (key names, dates, events, words and numbers). A summary must never rely on vague generalities.
- If you quote anything from the original text, even an unusual word or a catchy phrase, **you need to put whatever you quote in quotation marks (" ").**
- **A summary must contain only the ideas of the original text.** Do not insert any of your own opinions, interpretations, deductions or comments into a summary.

Watch It

Watch this video to see a walk-through explanation on how to summarize.
Click to view on the Excelsior website.
You can view the transcript for "Summarizing" here (opens in new window).

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is the act of putting an author's ideas into your own words. When reading, paraphrasing is helpful for checking your understanding of what you read as well as remembering what you read. When writing, paraphrasing is an important skill to have when constructing a research paper and incorporating the ideas of others alongside your own.

Watch It

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://open.ocolearnok.org/lstuckeycomp1/?p=119#h5p-49

Click to view the transcript for "Paraphrasing" here (opens in new window).

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3

GIVING CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Why and How to Cite Your Sources

Liz Delf

Using outside sources in your paper is a great move. Doing outside research enriches the conversation in your paper, builds your fluency and confidence in the subject, and can bolster (or challenge) your own argument. As a writer, it's important to give credit to the original author whenever you use outside words or ideas. This is true in every academic discipline, and it's true in less formal contexts, as well.

Citation Is Good for Creators

Imagine that you're scrolling through Instagram or TikTok (or whatever cool new social media platform has been invented since these words were written—the challenge of writing in such a fast-moving world!). If an influencer uses someone else's audio clip or artwork, it's considered basic internet courtesy to tag the original source to give them credit. In fact, if reposters don't do this, the original creator might publicly complain and accuse the "borrower" of stealing their work.

Why do they care? Why does it matter to the creators or artists if someone reposts their artwork? Some people would argue that reposting helps spread the art around, so it's actually good for the original artist. That makes sense, to a point—but how does that argument hold up if the original creator isn't tagged or attributed in any way?

Photo of a man reading a book by Oladimeji Ajegbile / Pexels

Your answers to those questions are probably similar to the reasons why citation matters in academia. Researchers and authors are generally glad for others to reference their work—after all, they published it rather than keeping it in a private diary—but they want credit for the work they've done. Using someone else's words or ideas *without* citing them—or citing them incorrectly—can feel like stealing. The original author (or content creator) only benefits from the "repost" if you cite their work, leading others back to the original source. In that sense, citation is an ethical issue: giving credit where credit is due.
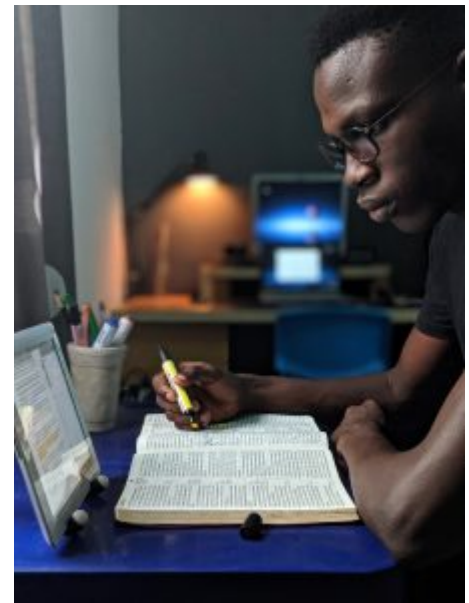
Citation Is Good for You Too

Don't get me wrong though. Citation isn't a purely selfless act. It also benefits you, the writer! Citing your sources builds your credibility as a speaker on the subject because it shows your audience that you have done your research. It gives your statements more weight by indicating that they came from a reliable source. (You should, of course, be using reliable sources; chapters 22 and 23 on evaluating sources can help you determine whether a source is trustworthy.)

For example, if you write that there will be 25 million centenarians (people who are 100 years old or more) in the year 2100, your reader will immediately want to know how you reached that conclusion. "Based on what?!" they'll ask. If the statistic seems to come out of nowhere, your audience could be distracted by the statement. They might even wonder if your arguments or conclusions are well founded, since you seem to be pulling numbers from thin air.

However, if you cite your source—and it's a reliable, reputable source—you will instantly build credibility with your audience. They will be more willing to accept the initial statistic and then listen to your argument on its own merits. You will show them that you have some knowledge on the topic and that your knowledge comes from authoritative sources.

Consider the following examples. Which is the most credible? The answer is clear: it's the one with the specifics and the citation.

> There will be even more elderly people in the future.
> There will be more than 25 million centenarians in the year 2100.
> Although the United Nations predicts that there will be 25 million centenarians by 2100, other demographers have found that population transitions and global events make it harder to pinpoint. A truer estimate is somewhere between 13 and 50 million (Robine and Cubaynes 60).

As you can see, citing your sources also pushes you to be more specific. In this case, I saw the "25 million" statistic in the article's abstract, but on closer reading, I found that the authors' research actually suggested a range. I had to read the article carefully to understand that point though—another key part of building your knowledge, fluency, and credibility.

Now, depending on your purposes, you may wish for a simpler version of the information. In many cases though, the more complex (and research-supported) version works better—it's potentially more accurate and, honestly, more interesting.

What to Cite

In every discipline, you need to cite outside words and ideas. If you're not sure whether to cite something or not, err on the side of caution and cite it! It's better to overcite than undercite. For example, you should always cite the following:

- Quotes
- Paraphrases
- Statistics
- Charts or other graphics
- Images
- Arguments or ideas
- Original phrases

Depending on your discipline, you might use some of these examples more than others. In the humanities, for example, quotes are an important form of evidence: how someone says something can be just as important as what they say. For that reason, quoting the original source is common in literature, history, and philosophy classes.

In other fields, the data are the most important point. In your science and social science classes, then, you will probably rely mostly on statistics and paraphrases as supporting evidence. It's rare to see a direct quote in an engineering paper.

Knowing what kinds of sources to use—and how to use them—is part of the learning you will do in your discipline. You can read example papers and articles in a particular field or ask your instructor for guidance.

What's consistent across all of these disciplines, though, is the need to cite the information. If you are using outside words or ideas, you need to essentially tell your audience, "Hey! This information came from another source. Here's how you can find it." You will do this by including two forms of citation for every outside source: (1) an in-text citation and (2) an end citation.

How to Cite

In-text Citation

The details of how to create citations will vary depending on what kind of class you're taking. In writing and other humanities courses, we often use MLA citation (which stands for Modern Language Association); psychology and other social sciences often use APA citation (American Psychological Association). Other citation styles include IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers), CSE (Council of Science Editors), CMS (*Chicago Manual of Style*), and more. Ask your instructor which citation style you should use for each class.

In all cases, though, you need to include an in-text citation (which will match up with an end citation—more on those in a minute). An in-text citation is like a signpost that says, "This! This right here! I didn't make this up—it's from an outside, credible source."

In APA, the in-text citation includes the author's last name and the year of publication, like this: (Garcia, 2008). The reader will easily find more information on the alphabetized works cited or references page by looking in the G section for Garcia.

What if there's no author listed? What if there are seventeen authors listed? The answer varies depending on your citation style—so you will have to do your own footwork to find the answer. The OWL at Purdue is an excellent resource for citation questions.

End Citations

Similar to in-text citations, end citations vary quite a bit. In all cases, though, the end citations provide significant details about the sources you cited in the text.

As a general rule, your in-text citations and end citations should match up. If you have six sources listed on your works cited page but only one cited in the body of your paper, there's a problem. In this example, your reader will get the sense that you did some research—but they won't be able to tell which information came from which source or even which ideas were yours and which belong to someone else. To avoid this problem, cite as you go—don't wait until the end and try to insert citations throughout the paper. That's a recipe for disaster.

While the specifics about formatting may vary, most end citations will include some or all of the following things in the order required by the style guide:

- Author(s)
- Title of the article
- Title of the source it came from (e.g., the journal, newspaper, or website title)
- Date of publication
- Volume and issue number (for journals)
- DOI or URL (for digital sources)

Again, though, there will be variation across citation styles. Some elements may be italicized or in quote marks, for example, or the authors' names may use only first initials.

While these differences and details may seem arbitrary, they're important because they tell careful readers what they're looking at. Attention to detail here can also add to the professionalism and credibility of your paper as a whole.

Here's the good news: you never have to memorize how to create perfect APA citations. What you *do* need to know, though, is that your sources have to be cited—and that you can find and apply the appropriate rules for your project whether it's in communications, psychology, or civil engineering.

A Word about Citation Tools

Real talk: how do you actually create citations for your papers? Chances are, you use a citation maker of some kind—either online, in the research database you are using, or embedded in Word or Google Docs. Instructors have different opinions about these, but I would argue that they're a valuable tool. Use what you have!

A warning, though: citation tools are a useful starting point, but they're not perfect. The free online versions are especially prone to missing style updates or incorrect formatting. The database and word processor versions (as well as citation managers like Zotero and EndNote) tend to be better, but again—not perfect. They're only as good as the information they pick up from the source (or that you input, depending on the tool).

For that reason, you should consider the citations that are churned out by these tools to be a rough draft. You will need to check them to ensure that they are accurate and consistent.

Additional Resources

1. For more on citation tools and citation managers: Oregon State University Libraries: Citations 101.
2. For all of the details about how to cite very specific source types, both in text and on the references page: The OWL at Purdue: Research and Citation Resources.

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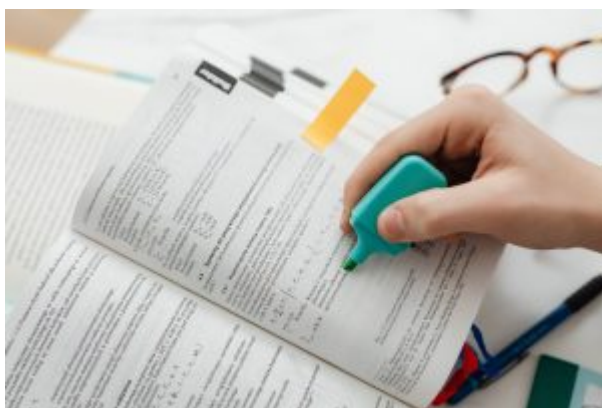
4

DECONSTRUCTING PLAGIARISM

Kristy Kelly

Person using a blue highlighter pen by Karolina Grabowska / Pexels

Plagiarism Is Complicated Stuff

We all know we're not supposed to plagiarize, but what exactly does that mean? Taking ideas from someone else? Copying their words directly? Quoting someone else's language without citing it? As with most things in writing classes, it turns out that plagiarism is contextual. The expectations for attribution and originality shift along with culture, academic discipline, and medium. We'll talk more about all of that later in this chapter.

But just because plagiarism is a contextual, slippery concept *doesn't* mean that it's unimportant or impossible to track what counts as plagiarism. In fact, as an author, it lies exclusively with you to track where the ideas you're working with come from, to attribute them properly, and to understand exactly what constitutes plagiarism in the first place so that you can steer clear of it. One of our favorite sources for understanding citation practices, the Purdue OWL, defines plagiarism as "using someone else's ideas or words without giving them proper credit" ("Plagiarism Overview"). It can certainly be difficult to trace where someone else's ideas start and where yours begin or where your paraphrasing of a source starts and the original language

you're building from ends. But even accounting for those blurry lines, it's still **never OK to pass someone else's work off as your own.**

In this chapter, we'll talk about how to navigate those blurry lines between working with someone's ideas and co-opting them and between paraphrasing a source and patchwriting from it. We'll also look at the deeper cultural perceptions of originality and attribution. By the end, you'll have a sense for how to avoid plagiarism and, more importantly, *why* to avoid it.

So What Exactly Is Plagiarism Again?

Let's break it down. We know that plagiarism involves including other peoples' ideas or language in your work without attribution. But one of the reasons that plagiarism can feel so fuzzy is that it can be difficult to trace what exactly counts as "including other peoples' ideas" or what kind of attribution is needed. There's also a spectrum of severity when it comes to plagiarism, ranging everywhere from letting an author's phrasing slip into your work without putting quotation marks around it to full-on copy-and-pasting paragraphs from a source without a citation. There's even such a thing as self-plagiarism, which involves copying your own writing from a previous context or assignment and including it in a new piece of writing without alerting your reader (or, in many cases, your instructor).

In most academic contexts you're likely to encounter in an American college setting, the following can be considered plagiarism:

- Copying wholesale phrases, sentences, or paragraphs from another source without citing, either in the in-text citations or in the works cited / reference list.
- Including language from an outside source without putting it in quotation marks, even if the work appears in your works cited or reference list.
- Patchwriting, or following too closely with the language of a source you're paraphrasing without putting quotation marks around borrowed phrases—again, even if the source appears in your works cited! (There's more on the difference between paraphrasing and patchwriting below.)
- Fabricating citations or making up where you found a quotation because you don't remember where you found it originally.
- Incorporating an original idea that comes directly from another source without attribution.
- Plagiarizing yourself or reusing your own writing from a previous piece of writing. Yes, that means it is appropriate to cite yourself if you want to reference your own writing in a new context!

Whew! That feels like a lot, to the point where including sources might start to feel like a landmine of potential mistakes. But so long as you (1) pay careful attention to where your sources come from and express that in your work, (2) stay mindful of the expectations set by your instructor for proper citations, and (3) treat other peoples' writing and ideas with respect and good faith, you'll be just fine.

Paraphrasing and Patchwriting: What's the Difference?

When you're working right alongside another author's ideas and putting their language into your own words, it's easy to slip up and let your sentences hew too close to theirs. Before we dive into the tips and tricks for paraphrasing effectively and avoiding patchwriting, let's take a look at what each of these terms means.

Paraphrasing means rephrasing another author's ideas in your own words without using any of their exact wording ("Paraphrasing"). That sentence is a paraphrase of Purdue OWL's definition of paraphrasing, because I communicated the main idea of their quote without copying it word for word. You might think of paraphrasing as a form of mental digestion—you need to fully understand a quotation and have your own sense of what it means before you can communicate it in your own way.

Patchwriting is when an author attempts to paraphrase a quotation but borrows too much language without putting quotation marks around it. In essence, patchwriting is shoddy paraphrasing! Here's an example: say I was trying to paraphrase this quote from the Purdue OWL, as I did above:

> *Quotation:* "Paraphrasing is one way to use a text in your own writing without directly quoting source material. Anytime you are taking information from a source that is not your own, you need to specify where you got that information" ("Paraphrasing").

> *Patchwritten version:* Paraphrasing is when you use a source in your own words without directly quoting the material. Wherever you take information from somewhere else, you have to specify where you got it ("Paraphrasing").

Do you see all the similarities there? By reusing phrases like "without directly quoting" and closely following the structure of the second sentence, I've patchwritten this source. The main problem is that I didn't put quotation marks around the borrowed language, which means that even though I used in-text citations at the end, **this would still count as plagiarism.** That may seem extreme, since the passage does show where the information comes from originally. There are indeed some small exceptions to this rule—namely, when you're citing statistics or numbers that would be impossible to phrase in another way. But in general, by failing to show which phrases are borrowed from the original source, you are passing others' words off as your own—and that takes us back to the definition of plagiarism at the start of the chapter.

Patchwriting happens increasingly often when students are working side by side with internet resources, and in the world of social media, borrowing and freely sharing ideas happens all the time. It's also hard to trace originality when we're using common phrases, including phrases like "put it into your own words" that appear in this chapter. It might make you wonder if you need to cite every single phrase in your paper, even if you can't track down who said it first! We could certainly do a deep dive into the question of whether an author can ever be truly original (and hopefully you will do so in class!), but for now, recall what we said about using sources in good faith: if you know a phrase came from a specific source, that's when you're responsible for fully paraphrasing, putting quotes around the directly borrowed phrases, and giving full attribution.

How Can I Avoid Patchwriting?

- If the quote expresses the idea so well that you're having trouble rephrasing it, quote it directly! Do check with your instructor that direct quotations are allowed—in science writing or tech writing, direct quotations might be banned!
- To help with paraphrasing, write or type out the quote in one place, then fully rephrase it on paper or on a different screen without looking at the original so that you're not overly influenced by the original language. You may need to do that a few times to digest what the quote is saying and how you'd frame it yourself.
- Think about why you're including the quotation in the first place: Is the specific language central to the reader's understanding of the subject? If so, quote directly. If you're trying to distill the idea and weave it more smoothly into your own content, paraphrase it. And in both cases, cite it!

Why Is Academia So Strict about Plagiarism?

You might be thinking that all of this sounds rather nitpicky, or even like a mode of gatekeeping to catch students out in an honest mistake. And honestly, you'd be at least partially right: accusations of plagiarism can come along with assumptions about who is capable of crafting original thoughts or what kinds of students are more likely to misunderstand or willfully misinterpret academic standards for citations. International students, people newer to academic settings, or people who are fluent in more than one language have been disproportionately accused of plagiarism, either because cultural differences lead them to view citation practices differently or because they don't have as much practice with the academic conventions for citation (Mott-Smith 251; Bloch 223–224). And that's not to mention the implicit biases that instructors might carry about students who don't already come in equipped with knowledge of citation practices in their discipline.

Academic notions of plagiarism are also complicated by the fact that across other industries and media, creators borrow—or outright steal—from each other all the time. For example, Apple is notorious for taking ideas from new apps available in the App Store and building them directly into the Mac operating system, in a move that's common enough to have the nickname "Sherlocking" (Albergotti). The music industry sees constant lawsuits targeting pop artists like Dua Lipa, Olivia Rodrigo, and Sam Smith for cribbing from other musicians, though it's always sticky to figure out where commonly adapted musical styles end and copyright-protected expressions begin (Finell, qtd. in Shanfeld). And when students themselves occupy an information environment where sharing, reposting, and memeifying are the norm, it's not surprising that academia's tough take on originality can feel baffling and arcane.

Any discussion of plagiarism raises complicated questions about authorship, intellectual property, and whether full originality is even possible. The freedom to build on others' ideas without fear of being slapped with an accusation of plagiarism is important to students' academic growth, and scholars in writing studies are increasingly convinced that handling plagiarism punitively does more harm than good to beginning writers (Howard and Robillard 1–7). Rather than treating unintentional plagiarism as a "gotcha" moment to gatekeep academic discourse, it's often more productive to treat it as a learning opportunity that sets students on the right track for navigating the world of citations. That's why we're expanding the conversation about plagiarism, so that students can be more thoughtful and deliberate about their citation practices. Maybe understanding the reasoning behind citations will make it less tempting to throw our hands up and disregard citation standards altogether. Because while these standards might be stringent and difficult to master, their underlying purpose is crucial: to treat others' ideas and creations with respect by attributing your sources accordingly.

While academic writing might demand more formality in showing whose ideas or creations are whose, it doesn't prevent writers from building from or collaborating with other authors. In fact, that kind of collaboration is the very reason why it's so important to cite others' work: academic conversations are more fair, equitable, and transparent for everyone when all participants use the same system to attribute original content to its source. The Apple example above shows the kinds of chaos that can ensue when there is no shared set of standards for building from others' work. Viewing citations as a form of protection for original ideas rather than an arbitrary set of rules that you'll get punished for breaking can make the process of learning the standards feel a bit more intuitive.

Final Tips for Understanding Citation Practices in Your Discipline

As we've said before, plagiarism is contextual, which means that the standards for academic honesty and citation practices vary across disciplines and institutions. When you enter into a new writing situation, it is always your responsibility to understand and apply those standards. Here are some final tips and tricks for understanding the standards in new writing situations:

- Familiarize yourself with the academic conduct guidelines at your institution.
- Make sure you know what citation format you'll be expected to use in each class (and if you're not sure, ask your instructor directly).
- Bookmark a trustworthy citation reference like Purdue OWL.
- Consider using a research and citation tool like Zotero to keep track of your citations.
- If you're not sure whether something you've written might constitute unintentional plagiarism, visit your campus writing center or ask your instructor.
- If you're finding yourself panicking over an assignment and tempted to plagiarize, stop and email your instructor. It's much better to ask for an extension or get extra help on an assignment than to plagiarize and deal with the consequences later.
- Remember that learning citation practices is a continual process. Even your instructors have to brush up on the latest changes in citation styles. Mistakes are OK, so long as you are treating others' work in good faith and giving credit where credit is due.

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