Using information from your sources in a written assignment

Tips for effective quoting, paraphrasing and summarising

There are three main ways of incorporating information from sources you have read or listened to into your written assignments. You can:

1. Quote,
2. Paraphrase, or
3. Summarise.

In most written assignments you will use a combination of these. All three must be accompanied by an in-text reference and a full reference at the end of the assignment.

Quoting

Quoting = using the exact words you found in your source. You quote when the words used in the source express a point so succinctly and well that you wish to reproduce them. **Quoting is to be used sparingly.** Typical challenges with quoting are:

- Getting the layout right
- Making sure the quotation marks are in the right place
- Making sure the quote fits in grammatically with the rest of your text
- Avoiding overuse

1. **Getting the layout right**

   Use single quotation marks around quotes of less than two lines and put them directly into your text. For any quote longer than two lines, indent the quote and set it apart from your text with an extra line space at the beginning and at the end. In this case you do not need quotation marks. In both cases you will need to reference your source, including the page number.

2. **Making sure the quotation marks are in the right place**

   There should be no gap between the quotation marks and the words of the quote. If you use a quote within your quote, use double quotation marks to make this clear.

3. **Making sure the quote fits grammatically**

   It is important to make sure your quote fits grammatically with your written text. This usually means that you have to adjust your own text because when you quote you have to preserve the words and punctuation of the quotation. It is, on occasion, permissible to change a minor word in your quotation to make it fit, e.g. to change a noun to ‘it’ to avoid repetition. You should indicate that you have made this change by putting square brackets around the word you have changed. You are also allowed
to cut a few words from a quote. You can indicate this by replacing the missing words with three dots with square brackets either side.

4. Avoiding Overuse

Be sparing with quotation. Overuse masks your own voice and can mean that you don’t fully demonstrate your own understanding of the topic. As a general rule, only quote when the words express the idea so well and so succinctly that there is no other good way of expressing it.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing = using your own words to express some relevant points that you have read in your sources. You paraphrase when you want to use some key points, using a similar number of words to the original. Typical challenges with paraphrasing are:

- Making sure your words are not too close to the original
- Distinguishing clearly between the ideas which are yours and those which come from your sources

1. Making sure your words are not too close to the original

When you paraphrase, your text should not contain sections that are copied word for word from the original. If you do find that you have included a section of text from the original you will need to put quotation marks around it or change it so that it is sufficiently different from the original.

2. Distinguishing clearly between the ideas which are yours and those which come from your sources

When you paraphrase it is important to make absolutely clear to the reader which ideas come from your source(s) and which are your own. You can do this with careful use of in-text referencing.

Summarising

Summarising = condensing information you have read into a concise account of the main points. You summarise when you want to communicate the essence of what you have read, keeping it brief. Typical challenges with summarising are:

- Making sure the information you include is relevant
- Including information from more than one source
1. Making sure the information you include is relevant

This can happen if you are not clear about the main point being made by your source or if you are not clear why you are including the information in your assignment.

If you find it difficult to identify main points in a reading text, check our online resources under Reading and Notemaking.

If you are unclear as to why you are including information from a source in your assignment, read your work again and check how the information supports the main point you want to make in your paragraph. Also, check how effectively it is responding to the assignment question.

2. Including summarised information from more than one source

To do this effectively you need plenty of practice. One way is to condense information that appears in more than one source and then list several sources as part of your in-text reference. Each source would then need to be listed in your reference list. Another way is to bring your information together carefully, making sure each piece is referenced as you bring it into your writing. This can mean including more than one reference in one sentence. If this looks too difficult for your reader to follow, edit the paragraph so that it reads more clearly.