Should I Quote, Paraphrase or Summarise?

In this fact sheet you'll learn the difference between quoting, paraphrasing and summarising.

AT A GLANCE

Quotation

- **Uses the exact words of the original author**
- **Displays the authority of the author**
- **To be used sparingly**

Eg. According to Bullock (2017, p.5) "a concentrated banking system results in large banks that are too big to fail".

Paraphrasing

- **Presents the ideas of others in your own words**
- **Demonstrates your understanding of the concepts**
- **May present the idea more simply or more clearly**

Eg. Bullock (2017, p5) argues that if a banking system has few banks governments cannot allow to let them fail when under financial stress.

Summarising

- **A brief overview of the central idea or theory**
- **Reduces a substantial amount of text to its central idea or structural outline**

Eg. In her article, Bullock (2017) argues that banking systems consisting of few banks present greater risks for customers than a system with many competing banks.

What is
Quotation?

Quotations are used when the actual words used by the author are important.

The following are some examples:

- When the words are the object of your discussion (eg something an expert said; the actual wording of a statute of law)

- When you are interpreting a statement (we need to know the original statement)

- When you want to make sure there is no confusion about what someone said (if you paraphrase, someone might say you have misrepresented them)

- As a means of distancing yourself from the author (eg When Friedman (1980, p. 2) insists that "Economic freedom is an essential requisite for political freedom" we can detect a potentially ideological prejudice in his argument.)

- When you provide a quote to support an interpretation/summary you have made (eg Neuman et al (2012) argue that formal education is not enough for a child's knowledge development, they must also be exposed to a rich environment that encourages their interest and demands their interaction. "Children's ability to process the world around them into a coherent knowledge base appears to be an important and key developmental process" (Neuman et al 2012, p. 12).)

Note:

Quotations are usually short. Only quote the words that need to be quoted. As a general rule, quotations are no more than two lines in length, but usually shorter.

What is
Paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing allows you to present an idea in clearer language, it demonstrates your own understanding of the idea and allows you to present it more clearly or simply.

Here are some examples:

1 Paraphrasing

This is a quotation from Yule, 1985, The study of Language.

"the term 'acquisition', when used in language, refers to the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally, whereas 'learning' refers to a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar."

This could be paraphrased as:

the acquisition of language is a natural process which occurs through use, whereas the learning of language requires the learner to consciously focus on the grammar and vocabulary (Yule, 1985).

Reference (using Swinburne Harvard guide): Yule, G. 1985, The Rule of Language, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK

Paraphrasing allows you to present an idea more simply and in language consistent with your own 'voice' and style. The idea reads as part of your understanding (which it is) and not just someone else's idea (even though the idea comes from a source you must cite). The meaning of the idea can also be nuanced in a way that suits your purpose.

2 Presenting an idea in simpler language

"a superplasticised sand-modified cementitious grout was optimised for use" (Berndt, 2015, p.1)

This might be paraphrased as:

sand was added to a cement grout to improve its efficiency (Berndt, 2015, p.1)

3 Interpreting an idea in a way that suits your argument

"Economic freedom is an essential requisite for political freedom" (Friedman 1980, p.2).

This might be paraphrased as:

For some economists, political freedom is only possible when individuals have economic freedom (Friedman 1980, p2), but this idea, at first look, seems very questionable.

What is
Summarising
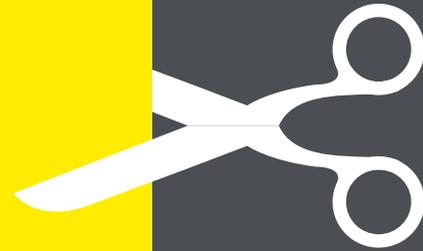
Summary is used when you want to:

- **provide an overall statement of an idea or theory**

- **clearly state the main idea in brief form**

- **reduce a fairly long account of an idea to its central elements**

- **state the main controlling idea of a paragraph/text**

- **outline the argument/discussion without including details**

- **simplify a difficult text by reducing it to its main idea**

- **review or compare a number of articles, arguments, and/or authors on a topic.**

These lists of when to quote, paraphrase or summarise are not exhaustive. However, they do highlight important reasons for your choices. You will use paraphrasing and summarising far more frequently than quoting as a means of incorporating other people's ideas into your assignments.

Remember: whether you quote, paraphrase or summarise you must cite your source

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