

Borough of Manhattan Community College

Using and Acknowledging Sources: A Guide for Students

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Writing Across the Curriculum Committee, BMCC

Many, if not most, college writing assignments ask you to include information from printed or online sources. You don't want to plagiarize.* How can you integrate published material into your writing while distinguishing between your ideas and those of your source? How do you ensure that readers can tell when you are drawing from a source and when you are expressing your own thoughts and opinions?

The most familiar way to draw from a source is by **quotation** – using an author's actual words, in quotation marks. But you can also make use of a source through **summary** or **paraphrase**. In a summary, which is far briefer than the original source, you present – in your own words – the core or gist of a passage, and perhaps a key example or detail. Thus a summary is far briefer than the original source. In a paraphrase, you restate the whole content of the original sentence/ paragraph/passage, following the author's order but using your own words. A paraphrase is likely to be longer than a summary. It may be close to the length of the original source, since you are restating almost everything the original writer says.

A. Whether you use quotation, summary, or paraphrase, you must credit the original source in one of the ways mentioned below under Citing Sources.

B. Be selective in using quotations. Use quotation primarily to present a memorable or important statement that expresses an author's point or argument more concisely or vividly than your own summary or paraphrase could. Even if you feel that an author's original wording is always better than your own, use quotation sparingly, and always acknowledge your source. If not familiar with the standard ways of citing sources, consult one of the handbooks or websites listed at the end of this handout.

C. Quote accurately and enclose quoted material between quotation marks. Readers assume that anything between quotation marks is an exact copy of what's in the source. If you decide to omit part of a quotation, even a word, you must substitute **ellipsis marks** (. . .) for the omitted material, and what remains must still be gram-matical. If you need to add or even slightly change anything to make the quotation work smoothly and grammatically in the context of your own writing, use **square brackets** [] around the addition or change. For more on ellipses and square brackets to signal omissions and additions or changes, see a standard writing handbook or on-line guide.

D. Blocked (indented) quotations Short quotations – from phrases to whole sentences – can be integrated into your own sentences, as shown in the examples under 5d, below. Quotations longer than three lines, however, should be “blocked”: leave double space between the regular text and the blocked quotation, single space the quotation and indent it to make a wider margin than regular text; when the quotation is complete, go back to regular margin and double space. Do not use quotation marks with a blocked quotation because the indentation and single-spacing are themselves a signal you are quoting.

E. When paraphrasing or summarizing, don't just change one or two bits of the original, **transform the author's words into your own**. A paraphrase or summary that is too close to the wording of the source will be seen as plagiarism, even if not intended.

* **BMCC's Policy on Plagiarism:** “Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words, or artistic/scientific/technical work as one's own creation. A student who copies or paraphrases published or on-line material, or another person's research, without properly identifying the source(s) is committing plagiarism. ¶ Plagiarism violates the ethical and academic standards of our college. Students will be held responsible for such violations, even when unintentional.... ¶ Plagiarism carries a range of penalties commensurate with the severity of the infraction. The instructor may, for example, require the work to be redone, reduce the course grade, fail the student in the course, or refer the case to the Faculty-Student Disciplinary Committee Cases referred to that committee could result in suspension or expulsion from the college.”

F. Integrate quotations, summaries, and paraphrases smoothly into your own writing.

(1) Use “signal phrases” to let the reader know when you are presenting someone else’s ideas. Don’t just drop quotations, paraphrases, or summary statements onto your page without signaling that you are using a source. The first time you quote or paraphrase an author, give the author’s full name and perhaps a very brief “tag” or identification so readers can assess the author’s perspective or relevance to your point or argument. For example:

As the economist Joseph Schumpeter has argued, . . .
Social critic Alvin Toffler explains that
According to *New York Times* reporter Barry Bearak . . .
In playwright Arthur Miller’s words, . . .
Newsweek writer Anna Fleary offers a different opinion, claiming that . . .

If your readers are likely to know who the author is, you don’t need the “tag,” but you should still give the complete name at first mention. In subsequent mentions, however, you can use last name only, as in these examples:

Smith has argued, . . .
Templeton explains that . . .
According to Underwood, . . .
In Volpe’s words, . . .
Wingate’s view is that . . .

(2) About signal phrases, Diana Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual* offers this good advice: “When the signal phrase includes a verb, choose one that is appropriate in the context. Is your source arguing a point, making an observation, reporting a fact, drawing a conclusion, refuting an argument, or stating a belief? By choosing an appropriate verb, . . . you can make your source’s stance clear”(87). Hacker provides the following list of verbs that can be used in signal phrases: “admits, agrees, argues, asserts, believes, claims, compares, confirms, contends, declares, denies, emphasizes, insists, notes, observes, points out, reasons, refutes, rejects, reports, responds, suggests, thinks, writes” (87).

(3) The signal phrase doesn’t always have to be at the very beginning of the sentence. Without sacrificing clarity, try for variety in placing your signal – for example in mid-sentence, enclosed in commas:

Another way of understanding Washington politics, Smith believes, is to “analyze the way lobbies operate” (<http://www.polaffairs.lobbies.com>).

Or if your sentence or quotation is short, place the signal phrase at the end, preceded by a comma:

“This is the wrong way of looking at the issue,” ombudsman Mark Green argues (*New York Daily News*, April 14, 2001, 21).

For another variation, notice that both quotations from Hacker in item (2) above are introduced by a full sentence followed by a colon (:). Also notice the use of an ellipsis (...) there to mark an omission from the original text, and the inclusion of a parenthe-sized page reference at the end, outside the quotation marks but before the period. These and other mechanics of punctuation are more fully explained in one of the handbooks or online guides at the end of this handout.

(4) Be careful that sentences which include signal phrases are grammatical and complete. In this sentence (which uses paraphrase rather than a quotation) it would be ungrammatical to say:

In Bearak's article, reports that last week's fall in stock prices wiped out all the gains since the beginning of the new year (39).

The sentence lacks a subject for the verb "reports." Correct the problem by deleting "In" at the beginning of the sentence and the comma after "article":

Bearak's article reports that last weeks fall in stock prices wiped out all the gains since the beginning of the new year (39).

(5) Proofread not only by scanning with your eye but by reading out loud – loud enough for you to **hear** your voice. You will be more likely to catch incomplete or ungrammatical sentences if you hear them as well as see them.

G. Cite sources for quotations, summaries, and paraphrases

(1) Sources must be cited for two reasons: (a) to give credit where credit is due; (b) to enable readers to find the source themselves if they want to. In most essays you will give full references for your sources in a "Works Cited" list at the end of the essay and short-form references in the body of the paper. (See one of the handbooks or online guides listed below for how to format the various kinds of items on a "Works Cited" list.) Short-form references – author's name in a signal phrase or in parentheses after the quotation or paraphrase, plus a page number – send the reader to the Works Cited list for the full reference. When parenthetical references occur at the end of a sentence (as they generally do), notice that the sentence period goes *after* the parentheses.

(2) Occasionally, in a relatively brief piece of writing, with one or two sources, your professor may permit you to include complete references in the body of the paper instead of in a separate list at the end. This handout illustrates that practice, too: see item F(3) above for examples. Notice that, like the page reference alone, the fuller citation is given in parentheses at the end of the sentence, before the terminating period.

As in the Hacker quotation in item F(2) above, even when the source identification precedes the quotation, the page number is still given at the end.

Note that you can cite the page number with, or without, the abbreviation "p." (pp. for pages, plural). In this handout, we cite page numbers alone, without p. or pp.

(3) These are only the basics of source citation. Different assignments may require some variations. Follow your teacher's instructions for citing sources, and/or consult one of the handbooks below (or any English composition handbook or guide), or one of the online writing guides listed below. For a paper in business, science, or social science, look under "APA documentation"; for a paper on literature, music, or art, look under "MLA documentation."

Handbooks:

Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, and Ann Raimes, *Keys for Writers*, or any other English composition handbook, will include the information you need.

For online information about effective quoting and paraphrasing, and the mechanics involved, see the following websites:

CUNY WriteSite

<http://writesite.cuny.edu>

Northern Illinois University Communication Skills website

<http://www.engl.niu.edu/comskills/students/quoting/quotations.html>

Purdue University Online Writing Lab

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>