

Summarizing and Paraphrasing

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines



For certain types of essays, you will be required to discuss your research sources in broad terms by giving an overview of the source, explaining its key points, or providing a shortened version of the information you are using within an argument. In these situations, you will need to condense the information and find a way to explain it in your own words to your reader. This can be accomplished in one of two ways: by summarizing and by paraphrasing.

Summarizing Vs Paraphrasing

Summarizing is taking a larger passage or complete work and giving an overview that focuses only on the parts that are most important to your own argument or claim. Summaries are short and more general in how they approach the original material. Paraphrasing, on the other hand, is putting a specific sentence, paragraph, or passage from another person's work into "your own words," or language that you believe your audience will better understand.

Summarizing is typically implemented when you want to give your audience an overview of an entire work, while paraphrasing allows you to focus in on a specific section of that work. While you can summarize shorter sections of a source rather than paraphrase them, you would almost never paraphrase large sections of a source or the entire source.

Summarizing and Paraphrasing in Action

Below is a paragraph offering an overview of the Writing Center's "common myths" from its website's "About" section:

Common Myths about Writing Centers

Writing Centers are for Remedial Writers

False! The Writing Center is for all writers, at all stages of the writing process. Discussion and feedback on writing useful at any point in the writing process, and for all types of writing. Whether you are working on an essay or a discussion post, a scholarship application or an email, on an assignment for Composition 1 or Senior Seminar, we can help you get your writing to the level that you want it to be.

The Writing Center is Only an Editing and Proofreading Service

Also false! First and foremost, the consultants at the Writing Center will never just make edits to your paper and hand it back. This is your work, after all, and you have the final say in any and all changes to it. Instead, when you come to the Writing Center you can expect to discuss any and all aspects of your writing, not just grammar, and to collaborate with your consultant in discovering ways to get your work to the level you want it to be at and to develop a plan of action for the next steps for your writing process.

Writing Centers Guarantee Better Grades

Because we are not your professors, this, too, is false. While we will always do everything we can to help you get your writing to the level that *you* want it to be at. Therefore, your consultant does will not directly edit an assignment; predict, explain, or assess the validity of a grade; or give the "okay" on a document as mistake-free. However, the Writing Center *can* be used in conjunction with feedback from your professors, and, in fact, we encourage you to visit us after you receive your feedback with any additional questions you may have. If you have questions directly related to your grades, we will always recommend that you see your instructor for more information.

On the backside of this handout are examples of a summary of this section and a paraphrase of this section as worked into a sample "About the Writing Center" essay.

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Summary

According to the Writing Center website there are a number of myths surrounding the use of Writing Centers. The website lists three specific myths: that only remedial writers can use the Writing Center, that the Writing Center is an “editing and proofreading service,” and that going to the Writing Center will automatically improve your grades (“About”). After introducing these myths, this section explains why these myths aren’t true and what the Writing Center can really do to help students who are working on their writing.

Notice that the summary begins by introducing the source of the material, the same way that you would with a quote—this is required every time you offer summary of a source. Even though this is a summary, you may have also noticed that it contains a quoted phrase (“editing and proofreading service”). This is because this phrase is the one specifically used by the original work, and is their specific term for this part of the section. Sometimes in a summary there will be specific key terms or phrases from the original author that you need to include, so these should still be quoted like a direct quote.

Paraphrase

The Writing Center website uses its “About” page to talk about three specific myths that surround the use of Writing Centers. The first is the myth that the Writing Center is only able to help remedial writers with their writing assignments. They explain that this is not true, and point out that the Writing Center can help students no matter what part of their essay it is that they are working on. They then explain that they can even help with writing that isn’t for a class, including resumes, and that they are able to help people with writing for all of their classes.

Unlike the summary, this section focuses in on a specific part of the source material (in this case, the first myth). It covers all of the same key points that the source material does, but does so using different language that emphasizes the writer’s understanding of the material and what they want their reader to focus on.

Citing Summaries and Paraphrases

The conventional wisdom regarding summarizing and paraphrasing is that they eliminate the need to cite the material, since they are written in “your own words.” **This is not the case.** When you are citing, you are citing the original author’s *ideas*, not just their word choice, so any time you present another person’s work, no matter how you do so, you must cite it. Some of the ways you can cite summaries and paraphrases include:

- Telling your reader who the original source is within the paraphrase or summary (i.e. “According to Writing Center Tutor Alexandria Ayala, there are a lot of myths regarding Writing Centers.”)
- Check your paraphrase or summary against the original text to make sure that the information is both accurate and in your own words. If you use any terms or phrases directly from the source, place them in quotation marks.
- Place an in-text citation at the end of any sentence that contains paraphrased material. You must do this *even if you have put the original text into your own words*, because it is the ideas you have to cite, not just the words themselves.

For more information regarding when, where, and how to cite, see our “Avoiding Plagiarism” handout.