

Quoting, Paraphrasing and Summarizing (MLA format)

How to incorporate the ideas of others into your essay

A quotation is a word-for-word repetition of written or spoken language. Quotation marks directly before and after the material tell the reader these are the exact words of the source. Quotations add spice to an essay and offer proof for important points. Thus, phrases and sentences should be quoted only if they are especially interesting or unusual, vividly convey a scene, mood or character, demonstrate authority or memorable language of the source, or are particularly appropriate to a point. Keep them as brief as possible, no more than 10-20% of the paper.

Examples: In "Two Kinds" Jing-mei says, "In all of my imaginings, I was filled with sense that I would soon become perfect" (Tan 29).

"We teach our kids that money can't buy love, and then we go ahead and buy it for them," writes Susan Cheever in "The Nanny Dilemma"(155).

Paraphrases and summaries are restatements of written or spoken language in your own words. Sentences or a paragraph are usually paraphrased. Longer passages should be restated in your own words in a shortened version that is, summarized. Do not add your opinions in the middle of paraphrasing or summarizing unless it is clear your ideas are not the original author's. Reintroduce the author's name to clarify any ambiguity to the reader. To avoid plagiarism, it is best to set the original source aside and then write your understanding of the author's ideas. Paraphrases and summaries do not use quotation marks. However, if you use some words from the original text along with your own words, you need to use quotation marks. See the second example below.

Examples: When the narrator of "Two Kinds," Jing-mei, looks in the mirror, she sees an angry and powerful girl staring back at her. She realizes that her identity is that of a strong and angry person. At this point, she thinks to herself, she will not let anyone change her (Tan 30).

In his essay, "The Art of the Fiesta," Octavio Paz describes a fiesta as a way for the isolated Mexican to "leap over the wall of solitude" and become a true participant in her community (88).

Tips on quoting and paraphrasing texts

It is best to introduce the quotation or paraphrase with a signal phrase which includes the author's name and provides context for the reader. That is, you must give the reader enough information to understand who is being quoted or paraphrased and why. The first time you include a quote or paraphrase in your essay, it is common to provide the author's first and last name. In subsequent quotes or paraphrasing from the same source, use only the author's last name. It is also permissible to place the author's name in the parentheses rather than in a signal phrase if you have already cited the author numerous times. MLA also requires you provide the page number for both quoted and paraphrased information. The list of signal verbs below will help you integrate quotes into your sentences. MLA format prefers the present-tense unless a specific date calls for past-tense.

acknowledges	concludes	emphasizes	replies	advises	concur	expresses	reports
responds	interprets	agrees	confirms	allows	criticizes	lists	reveals
answers	declares	objects	says	believes	disagrees	offers	suggests
charges	discusses	opposes	thinks	claims	disputes	remarks	writes