**Using Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism**

Academic writers use words and ideas from written sources to situate themselves in ongoing scholarly conversations about issues of concern in their fields. We want students to join the academic conversation, engage with the ideas of others, and express and support their own views. This means that they must learn to integrate the words and ideas of sources in their own texts and properly document them. This appendix addresses the following topics:

* Avoiding Plagiarism
* Quoting Sources
* Paraphrasing Sources
* Summarizing Sources
* Framing and Responding to Quotations
* Documenting Sources
* MLA Format

**Avoiding Plagiarism**

When a writer takes words and ideas from another writer and represents them as his or her own, we call it “plagiarism.” The worst form of plagiarism is when a student turns in an entire paper written by someone else—a friend, a parent, or someone on the Internet. That is academic dishonesty, a form of fraud that defeats the learning goals of the assignment. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense that can after multiple offenses result in expulsion from a university.

However, academic progress is built on the work of others. We don’t want students to be afraid of using sources. As students struggle to incorporate quotes, to paraphrase and summarize sources, they will make mistakes. They will occasionally rely too much on the words or syntax of the source, or they will fail to document properly. These should be seen as teachable moments, not crimes. Fear of plagiarism can lead to avoiding the use of sources and can inhibit learning as much as actual plagiarism. The inability to properly use sources can actually lead to plagiarism later, when a student is given a serious research assignment that he or she does not have the skills to do. If we can keep in mind the distinction between plagiarism that is an attempt at academic fraud and plagiarism that arises from an honest error in using sources, we can support students in learning the skill of using sources effectively.

One common mistake is when students think that they do not have to cite sources for paraphrases and summaries because changing a few words makes it their own. Quotations, paraphrases, and summaries must have sources cited both in the text and in the bibliography or “Works Cited” page at the end. It is not just words but also ideas that must be documented. Clearly marking ideas that writers take from other sources also helps them establish an explicit stance, distinguishing the previous conversation from their own contributions to that conversation.

**Quoting Sources**

The first step is to choose the right passages to quote. When students initially begin working with a text that is a potential source of ideas for their writing, they should be encouraged to underline main ideas, strong statements, interesting facts, and effective language. To begin the writing process, the student should return to these underlined portions with the writing project in mind. The following questions will help students think about what parts of the source they may want to use:

* Is there a sentence or passage that sums up or is representative of the author’s position or approach?
* Is there a sentence or passage that I strongly agree or disagree with?
* Is there something in the text that is particularly well said?
* Is there something that will support (or refute) the position I am going to take in my paper?
* Are there any controversial statements?

If the student is working with multiple texts and authors, it may be useful for him or her to write down quoted passages on note cards, taking care to indicate the source and the page number or other bibliographic information.

When quotations are integrated into the text, writers usually frame the quoted material with their own text identifying the author and the source and enclose the quoted material in quotation marks. In the U.S., the period or comma goes inside the quotation marks unless the writer is using a parenthetical citation, in which case the punctuation follows the closing parenthesis. Question marks go inside or outside depending on whether they are part of the quote or the student is asking a question about the quote. Students should practice correctly punctuating the quotes they have chosen. Here are some examples:

In “A Change of Heart about Animals,” Jeremy Rifkin notes that “In Germany, the government is encouraging pig farmers to give each pig 20 seconds of human contact each day and to provide them with toys to prevent them from fighting.”

Rifkin asks, “Should wild lions be caged in zoos?”

Is Jeremy Rifkin correct when he says, “The human journey is, at its core, about the extension of empathy to broader and more inclusive domains”?

If a passage the student wants to quote is longer than a couple of sentences, it can be set off as a block quote. Block quotes are indented and are often single-spaced.

Rifkin finds that even animals mourn their dead.

Of course, when it comes to the ultimate test of what distinguishes humans from the other creatures, scientists have long believed that mourning for the dead represents the real divide. It's commonly believed that other animals have no sense of their mortality and are unable to comprehend the concept of their own death. Not necessarily so. Animals, it appears, experience grief. Elephants will often stand next to their dead kin for days, occasionally touching their bodies with their trunks. (15)

Block quotes are especially useful when the writer is going to analyze the language, structure, or arguments of the passage in some depth. Students often overuse them, however, thinking that they are easy to drop into their text.

Direct quotes create the most distance between the writer’s perspective and the perspective of the source. When we use quotation marks to represent another’s speech or writing, we are signaling that these are the exact words of the source, and we are setting off those words as distinct from our own. There is a high degree of separation. On the other hand, when we use reported speech to represent what the other said, we change the grammatical form and lose the quotations marks, so that the words of the other are not entirely separated from our own. Our words and the other’s words are merged to some extent. The current writer’s voice and the source writer’s voice are speaking more harmoniously. When we paraphrase, these voices are merged even more. We are still indicating through citation that our words and ideas have a source, but in a sense we are speaking those words ourselves.

Direct quotes are best used only when the writer is going to analyze the language of the source, when something is particularly well said, or when the source has particular authority and the student wants to use the ethos of the source to bolster his or her own argument.

Completing one of the following statements for each selected quote may help students discover what their response to the quote is, and later help them integrate the ideas into their own paper.

* I agree with this because . . .
* I disagree with this because . . .
* The author has a point, but has not considered . . .

**Paraphrasing Sources**

A paper should not be a series of direct quotes strung together with transitions and introductory phrases. Direct quotes should be used judiciously, for good reasons. In academic research papers, most of the ideas from sources appear in paraphrases. To paraphrase is to represent or report the words of another in one’s own words. However, student writers tend to resist paraphrasing because it is much more difficult than quoting. To paraphrase, one must completely understand the original, whereas one can often get away with dropping in a quote that one is uncertain about. Students think that quotes “speak for themselves.” They do, but if they are not introduced, framed, and integrated, especially if the student doesn’t understand them completely, they create incoherence. More on this in “Framing and Responding to Quotes” below.

The simplest form of paraphrase is reported speech. This is a grammatical transformation that changes a direct quote into a report of what someone said. For example, look at the following conversation:

Belinda: “Where are you going Harry?”

Harry: “I ‘m going to the library to study Shakespeare.” (leaves)

Dolores: “Where did Harry go?”

Belinda: “He said he was going to the library to study.”

When Belinda reports what Harry said, she changes his words from first person to third and his present tense to past. This transformation into reported speech is very common in conversation. In fact, whole conversations often consist of retelling what someone else said. Students are quite adept at this in speech, but having them record and transcribe conversations may help them move from oral ability to a literate practice. In an academic context, we might transform a quote such as this:

“I do find it curious that it has taken us so long even to bother to ask whether fish feel pain” (Braithwaite 8).

to a report like this:

Victoria Braithwaite finds it curious that it has taken us so long even to bother to ask whether fish feel pain (8).

In this transformation, Braithwaite’s language is merged to a certain extent with the writer’s. The writer’s voice and Braithwaite’s are no longer separated by quotation marks. However, some might say that in this context the reported speech is too close to the original, and want to put quotation marks around part of the sentence:

Victoria Braithwaite finds it “curious that it has taken us so long even to bother to ask whether fish feel pain” (8).

Note that the part in the writer’s voice and the quoted words must fit together grammatically as a sentence.

Of course, the voices can be merged even further:

Victoria Braithwaite finds it strange that it has taken us so long to think about whether fish feel pain (8).

As the voices merge, the style becomes smoother and easier to read and process. However, if we quote one word from the original it puts a lot of emphasis on that word and a lot of distance between our own voice and the source’s:

Victoria Braithwaite finds it “curious” that we have been so unconcerned about whether or not fish feel pain (8).

This is sometimes called using “scare” quotes, indicating that although others use this word in this context, the current writer has some doubts about it.

The ability to paraphrase a passage without significantly altering its meaning is an indication that the student understands the material and can use it in his or her own writing without creating incoherence. Students can practice by choosing quotes from the previous activity. recasting them in reported speech, and then changing the words and the syntax even more to merge the voices further. Note that with paraphrasing (and summarizing) having students use language that appropriately attributes the ideas to their source is especially important.

Students can practice paraphrasing by taking the quotations they have selected and reporting them in various ways.

**Summarizing Sources**

To paraphrase is to put a passage from a source into one’s own words. To summarize is to put the main ideas of an argument, an article, a section, a chapter, or a whole book into one’s own words. If several sources are being cited, it may be useful to summarize the arguments of one or more of them. A summary is also a good way to introduce the general content or position of an article before analyzing it in more detail. For example, one could use this summary of the Rifkin article to introduce a section that looks at each of the studies he cites in more detail:

In “A Change of Heart about Animals,” Jeremy Rifkin cites study after study to show that animals and humans are more alike than we think. He shows that animals feel emotions, reason, make and use tools, learn and use language, and mourn their dead. One study even shows that pigs need affection and playtime with one another, and enjoy playing with toys (15).

The Descriptive Outlining process described in the “Considering the Structure of the Text” section of the ERWC Assignment Template is an effective way to gather the information necessary for a good summary.

**Framing and Responding to Quotations**

Quotes, paraphrases, and summaries should not be dropped into the writer’s text for no apparent reason. At the very least, the source material should be framed by a lead in and a response. For example, here is a way to frame another block quote from the Rifkin article:

Jeremy Rifkin argues every step of the way that animals are more like humans than we imagine them to be. He sets up every traditional distinction between humans and animals and then knocks it down with a study that shows that distinction to be questionable. Thus we expect him to be leading to a conclusion that we should not eat animals, or use them in experiments. Instead, he concludes

The human journey is, at its core, about the extension of empathy to broader and more inclusive domains. At first, the empathy extended only to kin and tribe. Eventually it was extended to people of like-minded values. In the 19th century, the first animal humane societies were established. The current studies open up a new phase, allowing us to expand and deepen our empathy to include the broader community of creatures with whom we share the Earth. (15)

Rifkin presents human history as if it has been a step-by-step extension of empathy to more and more species. Is this true? Even if it is, which seems doubtful, this conclusion does not follow from the evidence that Rifkin presents.

When students use material from sources in their texts, they should think about the following:

* What purpose does this serve for my reader?
* How does this material support my argument or make my point?
* How can I put this material in a clearer context?
* How can I help my readers understand this material?

**Documenting Sources**

The two most common documentation systems used in university work are those of the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Psychological Association (APA). Different disciplines use different styles. English departments use MLA and the social sciences APA, although linguists working in English departments also use APA. Historians usually document sources according to the system in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The popular *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian presents a version of Chicago style. Scientific journals usually use the style of the Council of Science Editors (CSE). There is no way that a high school teacher could prepare students for all of the different documentation systems they will encounter in a university. However, although the formats are different, the basic elements of any documentation system are the same.

Whatever format they use, your students will need to learn to record all the necessary information and acquire the habit of documenting sources. They will need to record, at a minimum, the author, title, city of publication, publisher, date of publication, and page number when citing a source. In this section, it is impossible to provide sample citations for all of the different types of sources your students may want to use, so we will provide only some very basic examples in MLA. Online style manuals are available for the major citation styles. One of the best and easiest to use is the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>. That site covers both MLA and APA.

**MLA Format**

The MLA format was revised in 2009. One must now include the “medium of publication,” which is usually Print or Web, but could also be Film, CD-Rom, or DVD. The URL is no longer necessary for web sources. For articles that originally appeared in print but have been accessed through an online database, the name of the database is required, typed in italics.

**Books.** Here is the MLA format for the citation for a typical book:

Last name, First name. *Title of Book*. Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication. Print.

Here is an example with multiple authors:

Bean, John C., Virginia A. Chappell, and Alice M. Gilliam. *Reading Rhetorically: A Reader for Writers*. New York: Longman, 2002. Print.

**Newspapers.** Here is the bibliographic information for the article quoted above in MLA format. Because it was published in a newspaper, the format and the information included differ somewhat from the basic citation given above.

Rifkin, Jeremy. “A Change of Heart about Animals.” *Los Angeles Times* 1 Sept. 2003: B15+. Print.

**Web sites.** Students often want to incorporate material from Web sites. To document a Web site, they will need to give the name of the author (if known), the title of the site (or a description, such as “Homepage,” if no title is available), the date of publication or update (if known), the name of the organization that sponsors the site, and the date of access. For example,

*University Writing Center.* 26 June 2003. University Writing Center, California Polytechnic State University, Pomona. 26 May 2004. Web.

The author for the above site is unknown, so no name is given. This entry would appear in the Works Cited section alphabetized by “University.”

**In-Text Documentation.** MLA style, as well as all other documentation styles, also require in-text documentation for every direct quotation, indirect quotation, paraphrase, and summary. Students are often confused by this, believing that documentation is necessary only for direct quotations. If the author’s name is given in the text, the page number should be given in parentheses at the end of the sentence containing the material. If not, both the author’s name and the page number are required in the in-text citation. For example, here is a paraphrase of material from the Rifkin article. Because the author is not named in the text, the last name goes in the parentheses:

It is well-established that animals can learn to use sign language. A long-term study at the Gorilla Foundation in Northern California shows that Koko, a 300-pound gorilla, can use more than 1,000 signs to communicate with her keepers and can understand several thousand English words. She also scores between 70 and 95 on human IQ tests (Rifkin 15).

An academic paper is most often a dialogue between the writer and his or her sources. If your students learn to quote, paraphrase, summarize, and document sources correctly, they will be well on their way to becoming college students.

This short introduction presents only the basic concepts of MLA documentation. Your students will need access to the Purdue OWL, mentioned above, or a book such as the *MLA Handbook for Writers of* *Research Papers,* 7th Edition*,* which covers the system in more detail.

Works Cited

Braithwaite, Victoria. “Hooked on a Myth: Do Fish Feel Pain?” *Los Angeles Times* 8 Oct. 2006: M.5. Print.

Rifkin, Jeremy. “A Change of Heart About Animals.” *Los Angeles Times* 1 Sept. 2003: B15. Print.

Modern Language Association. *MLA Handbook for Writers of* *Research Papers.* 7th ed. New York: MLA, 2009. Print.

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