

# Integrating Sources

## Signal Phrases

Academic writers **cite their sources** of information or ideas, usually by adding an in-text citation after quoted or paraphrased content, for example:

“Your title is the first thing your readers read, but it should be the last thing you write” (Turabian, 2018).

However, the writer could use a **signal phrase** in addition to the citation above:

Turabian—founder of Chicago style—observes, “Your title is the first thing your readers read, but it should be the last thing you write” (2018).

Signal phrases can:

- help the reader distinguish which parts of your paper originate from an outside source, and which parts are your ideas
- offer contextual information (how the source’s claim fits with your argument, or with arguments made by other sources you’ve cited)
- include relevant information about your sources (job title, for example)
- add variety to your sentence structure.

There is no finite list of signal phrases; they are defined more by what they *do* than what they look like. They can tell the reader who is saying what, how they’re saying it, and how it fits into the current academic conversation about the topic—all of which will help you **write like a scholar**.

Below are some ways to use signal phrases. (Don’t use all of these ideas at once in the same signal phrase; it might obscure the cited information. There’s also no need to include a signal phrase in every citation in your paper. As with any other writing choice, use signal phrases only if you think they add value to your writing.)

### Contextualize the cited information

Consider how your signal phrase might suggest the cited material’s **place in its academic context**. Is the material controversial or well-established? Where does this information or claim sit within the broader scholarship on this topic? How does this information fit into your argument: does it support it, contradict or undermine it?

You might use one of these phrases to offer contextual information:

- Similarly, da Souza claims...
- In contrast, Roy refutes Jordanou's claim...
- Brandt agrees, noting that...
- A leading voice among scholars who support x, Kwame says...
- Duncan-McQuaig rejects this broadly-accepted interpretation, pointing out that...
- Ibrahim adds to / expands on Taan's work by suggesting that...
- Rossi warns against such a conclusion, however, observing that...

Here are some examples, with the signal phrase in **bold** font:

**"John Gennari's pioneering study of jazz criticism** hints at this point: he emphasizes both the conflation of romanticist folklorism and racial progressivism" (Wells, 2017).

**"Read's classic report** (50) described a method of measuring ventilatory responses to CO<sub>2</sub> in subjects rebreathing from a bag of known PCO<sub>2</sub> and PO<sub>2</sub>" (Domnik, Turcotte, Yuen, Iscoe & Fisher, 2013).

**"[Peters'] exploration was written in the heyday of Kohlbergianism, when** exclusive emphasis was still put on reason over habit, form over content, in moral coaching" (Kristjánsson, 2006).

**In the sciences, quotations are rarely used;** instead, writers more typically paraphrase or summarize relevant information and then cite it. However, you can still contextualize the paraphrased information. **In the example below**, authors Domnik et al **lend context** (i.e., that previous scholarship did not assign as much importance to the role of certain biochemical interactions as current scholarship tends to) to paraphrased information shared in an earlier sentence. Note that this contextual information **is itself cited**, because it is not common knowledge:

**"However, interactions between central and peripheral chemoreceptors may be of greater importance than heretofore believed** in controlling the ventilatory response to CO<sub>2</sub> (3, 15)." (Domnik et al, 2013).

Later in the same article, Domnik et al **contextualize their own findings in the broader literature of their field**, citing a source whose findings are inconsistent with theirs, and suggesting an explanation for the inconsistency:

**"This [finding] differs from our analysis** showing normally distributed values of threshold and sensitivity in the study of Slessarev et al. (55). **Their data were obtained from** Caucasian men, **whereas our subjects included** male and female students of various ethnic backgrounds and athletic conditioning levels..." (Domnik et al, 2013).

## Contextualize the cited author

Use a signal phrase to share **brief, relevant** information about the author you're citing. This information can help establish or undermine the source's credibility. Consider:

- the author's job title or role (e.g., scholar, researcher, journalist, research participant, Minister of the Environment, Speaker of the House, bank CEO, shareholder, donor, etc.).

- the author’s currency (how recent is this source’s information: decades old, or from last year?). Depending on the context, it might be very helpful to your reader to know that you are citing a contemporary of a century-old historical event, or a current researcher.
- the professional / academic status of your source (is the source a founder of the field, a new scholarly challenger, a professional or academic “outsider”?).

“This was the time when **the eminent philosopher of education R.S. Peters** coined the phrase ‘the paradox of moral education . . . ’” (Kristjánsson, 2006)

“A notable contribution to this transnational genealogy of anti-colonial Calibans is that of **the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos**, with his version of a Portuguese “Calibanised Prospero”, **famously developed** in . . . ” (Martins, 2013).

### Add variety to your sentence structure

Signal phrases offer you an opportunity to write a sentence with a different structure or rhythm from your own typical style, lending variety and interest to your writing. For example, try placing a signal phrase in the middle of a sentence, particularly if there is a natural break and this placement lends emphasis to the point you are making:

“Your title is the first thing your readers read,” Turabian observes, “but it should be the last thing you write” (2018).

“I am moved by my love for human life,” **writes Maracle**, “by the firm conviction that all the world / must stop the butchery, stop the slaughter” (Maracle, 2000).

You might also write a signal phrase that is so full of information that it changes the balance or rhythm of the sentence. For example, here is the original:

“**Peters deserves credit for his insistence that** these paradoxes – or, as he understood it, ‘the paradox of moral education’ – are resolvable” (Kristjánsson 2006).

If you removed the signal phrase from the original above to create the sentence below, the sentence would not only lose some of its meaning; it would also have a completely different rhythm and balance; try reading both out loud.

Peters insists that ‘the paradox of moral education’ is resolvable.

There is no “correct” or “better” way of the two options; as a writer, you must judge for yourself which serves your writing purpose best.

### Choose suitable signal verbs

Choosing the right verb can tell the reader a lot about the tone and strength of the source’s claim. If you are not sure which verb to choose, consider your intention in citing a particular source; the

source's tone and strength of claim; and how the source's content fits into your own argument. Here are some possible verbs:

responds	disputes	concedes	recognizes	contends	proposes
argues	suggests	proposes	juxtaposes	emphasizes	describes
proposes	implies	hypothesizes	agrees	underscores	demonstrates
asserts	reports	compares	criticizes	highlights	comments
states	notes	contrasts	analyzes	illustrates	points out
surmises	writes	endorses	grants	admits	acknowledges

#### A final note:

To follow academic integrity principles, always ensure you **accurately represent your sources and their content**; never use a signal phrase or punctuation such as ellipses to manipulate the meaning or context of quoted, paraphrased, or summarized material.

## Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is the art of expressing someone else's idea or information in your *own* words (you *must* still cite the original source). A paraphrase of someone's work usually offers more detail than a summary of the same information, and is often, but not always, more concise than the original.

Of all the skills required by scholarship, good paraphrasing is one of the most essential. Here are some rules of thumb:

- Paraphrase *more*; quote *less*.
- Paraphrase to explain a point from a source.
- Use your own words and use your own sentence structure.
- *Really* good paraphrases are structured to show how the source's point is connected to yours.

### Metaphrase vs. Paraphrase

If you keep the original sentence structure and simply replace some terms with synonyms, even if you cite the source, it's plagiarism by metaphrase. Paraphrase by writing the idea in your own words and in a new sentence structure. For example,

- **original**  
Three different but complementary versions of the questionnaire were developed.
- **metaphrase**  
Three unlike but compatible kinds of the questionnaire were produced.

- **paraphrase**

The investigators created three related questionnaires.

A valid paraphrase must do more than change/reorder the author's words. **Metaphrasing is plagiarism!**

### To Paraphrase Properly...

Set the original source aside as you are writing your paraphrase.

- Once you've set aside the original, write the main point of what you just read. Write it as though you're telling it to someone who needs the information but has a bus to catch in two minutes.
- Go back to the original again to see if your paraphrase captures its main point.
- If not, set the source aside and try again.
- Check your final version against the original after writing it in your own words to ensure that the *meaning* of the original passage remains intact, but that you haven't metaphrased.
- If you use any key phrases or unique wording from the original author, place these in quotation marks.
- Always include a citation!

### Example

#### Source text

Nowaczyk, Santos, and Patton (1998) assessed student perceptions of PPT use in an introductory behavioural statistics course and found that **students** reported at both the midterm and final exams that they **preferred PPT** to help them understand the course material. **However**, at the final exam, students reported that they favoured the traditional lecture format for enhancing actual classroom interaction among students and the instructor. The last finding, along with other research, indicates that PPT may at a minimum have a neutral effect on classroom interaction and may potentially even deter classroom interactions by **minimizing classroom spontaneity** (Murphy, 2002) and hindering deeper discussions of material (Cyphert, 2004; Hanft, 2003; McDonald, 2004).

#### Paraphrased text

*Although university students see PPT as beneficial to their understanding of material, research suggests that PPT might limit impromptu discussions in the classroom (Nowaczyk, Santos, & Patton, 1998).*

**“Why do I need to know how to paraphrase and summarize information? Can't readers just go to my source if they want to know more about it?”**

No. Here's why:

- Whatever you're telling the reader about someone else's idea is useful only insofar as it relates to your point.
- The reader only needs to understand the idea you're working with, not its details.
- If you give the reader too much of what others say, the reader will lose sight of your ideas.

- Think **illustration**, not **reiteration**.

## Quoting

Quoting—using a cited source’s *exact* words in your writing—is an important strategy in academic writing. Quoted content strengthens your argument as evidence, shows your readers how your work fits into current research and indicates the sources you’ve read to develop your thinking. Knowing why, when, and how to quote is critical to good scholarship.

Academic writers quote from sources to serve **specific purposes**, i.e., to:

- support their argument using specific words as evidence
- use—ethically—another writer’s unique phrasing
- draw attention to a source’s authority or importance
- accurately and fairly represent content with which they disagree
- add interest and variety to their writing (sometimes)
- offer context for their argument (often better done by **paraphrasing**).

Remember that quoting is **not enough** to sustain an argument. Quote to **support** your claims, **not to substitute** for your own thinking and ideas in a paper. You must develop your own analysis and interpretation, make connections among points, and share your own insights.

### Some guiding principles for quoting

- In the Canadian academic context, it is expected that if you quote (or paraphrase, or summarize) a source, you have **read** the whole source.
- **Quote only** when it serves a purpose (see list above); **otherwise**, summarize or **paraphrase**.
- Some **disciplines** (the humanities in particular) rely more heavily on quotations because of the nature of their research and analysis; others (the social sciences and sciences) paraphrase or summarize more. **Learn the source conventions of your discipline.**
- **Represent** your sourced content’s meaning and context accurately and use the original wording *exactly* (see below for exceptions).
- Ensure your sources are **scholarly**, i.e., acceptable by academic standards. The Queen’s University Library [guides](#) are helpful in evaluating sources.
- **Always cite your sources**, regardless of the source of the quote: a scholarly article or book, a film, a website, a conversation or another medium.
- Use the [style guide](#) (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) recommended by your professor / used in your discipline to learn how to cite quotations properly. List all of your sources in the bibliography or reference list at the end of your paper. Another helpful resource on formatting quotations: the Editors’ Association of Canada’s book, *Editing Canadian English (2015)*.

- **Don't drown out your own ideas** by quoting too extensively from other sources. Your voice should be clear, and your argument your own; curate your sources to support it rather than obscure it.
- **Lend context to your quote**; don't just drop it into a paragraph and assume the reader knows why you've chosen it or how it supports your argument (see below). Consider the quoted content from the reader's perspective: should you state when, where, or under what circumstances it was said or written, or share information about its speaker / author?

## Integrate quotations into your writing

- It's less common to see quoted content as the first or last sentence in a paragraph; these sentences are usually reserved, respectively, for introducing the main idea of the paragraph, and analysing the quoted evidence to link it to the paper's broader argument.
- Use **signal phrases** to contextualize your quoted content and its source.
- It is acceptable to occasionally **change quoted content** for the sake of clarity and consistency—for example, when the grammatical structure of the quoted content doesn't match that of your sentence, when the quoted content includes an error, or when a word, name, or event needs clarification. However, you must make it clear to the reader which changes you've made; see our resource on **ellipses and brackets** to learn **how to omit or add content**.
- Consider using an introductory phrase before the quoted content to briefly indicate how it is relevant to the point you are making. For example:

*Domnik's work suggests that this area of research would benefit from a greater diversity of study participants: "this [finding] **differs from our analysis . . . . Their data were obtained from Caucasian men, whereas our subjects included male and female students of various ethnic backgrounds and athletic conditioning levels**" (Domnik et al, 2013).*

- **After** the quotation, offer **your analysis** of the quoted material and its significance to your argument. Your analysis should help your reader understand why you chose to include the quoted content, and how it illuminates your thinking. For example:

*"Wagamese, a talented oral story-teller as well as a writer, often begins his storytelling circles with the same words; he says, 'There was once, for all of us, a fire in the night . . . To talk, to tell our stories, to teach each other, is as necessary to our growth as water. We're all storytellers. We always were. But most of us have forgotten that . . .' By encouraging listeners and readers to think about and, ideally, reconstruct and thereby 'own' their stories, Wagamese's novels remind us of the transformative power of narrative, as it cuts across cultural boundaries and histories" (Schorcht, B., & Wagamese, R., 2008).*

## Format quotations

Each discipline or [style guide](#) (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) has its own particular rules to follow; follow your style guide's recommendations carefully, and don't assume that quotations in a Sociology paper take the same format as those in an English Literature essay. Look especially for **variations** in the following:



- block quotations: how many lines or words should a quotation be for it to be in “block” form?
- punctuation: should it go inside or outside the quotation marks?
- superscript numbers for endnotes or footnotes: where should they be placed?
- in-text citations: what information should be included (author, year, page number)?
- lines from poems or plays: should you use separate lines, or slash marks?

## Summarizing

Summarizing a scholarly article, book or section of text means to:

- thoroughly **review, understand** and **select** its main ideas and
- **communicate** them **accurately** but much more **concisely**.

It’s important to learn when and how to summarize according to the conventions of your academic discipline. [Reading](#) and [note-taking](#) skills, and a good understanding of [academic integrity](#), underpin skillful summarizing.

**Summarize when you want to:**

- capture a source’s **main idea**, not specific words or details
- offer **context** for your argument ([paraphrasing](#) is another option)
- show how your ideas fit into current research
- indicate the sources you’ve read to develop your thinking.

Remember that summarizing others’ work is **not enough** to sustain an argument; it is not a **substitute** for your own thinking and ideas in a paper. You must develop your own analysis and interpretation, make connections among points, and share your own insights.

### Guidelines for summarizing

- In the Canadian academic context, it’s understood that if you summarize a source, you have **read** the whole source.
- Academic writers in the **humanities** tend to quote; in the **social sciences** and the **sciences**, they tend to paraphrase and summarize.
- Summaries are best used to offer **context and background information**, rather than direct evidence for a point you are making.
- When you take summary notes, focus on the source’s **main ideas**, their **relationship** with each other, and their major **supporting points**; you may also want to note important **terms**.
- Ask yourself **why** you choose to include this summary in your paper; how does the original content **relate to your point**? How will it **help your reader** follow your argument?
- Use **your own words**. Summarizing usually involves condensing a long text or a whole article or argument into a much shorter passage, so it is often easier to avoid copying original phrases



when summarizing, compared to paraphrasing, but you must still be careful. Try the strategies outlined in our [paraphrasing](#) section.

- **Don't** summarize other sources so much that your voice is absent or your argument obscured.
- Ensure your sources are **scholarly**, i.e., acceptable by academic standards. The Queen's University Library [guides](#) are helpful in evaluating sources.
- **Always cite your sources.** Use the [style guide](#) (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) recommended by your professor / used in your discipline to learn how to cite a summary properly. List all of your sources in the bibliography or reference list at the end of your paper.

## Represent the original accurately

- Make sure you thoroughly **understand** the original source before you try to summarize it.
- Take note of the **context** of the original content:
  - Summarize the main points that lead up to a claim—the source's **evidence and interpretation**—not just the claim itself.
  - **Don't suggest** that a claim has greater or lesser relevance, importance, or strength than it has in the original source.
  - Include relevant information about the source's **scope and strength** (is it a study with a small or large sample size? Were the findings significant? To what extent? Were there limitations or errors?).

## Integrate summaries into your writing

- It's less common to see summarized content as the first or last sentence in a paragraph; these sentences are usually reserved, respectively, for introducing the main idea of the paragraph, and analyzing the quoted evidence to link it to the paper's broader argument.
- **Name** the work you are summarizing and its author in your summary; perhaps use a [signal phrase](#) to do so.
- **After** the summary, briefly explain the significance of the summarized material to your argument. Help your reader understand why you chose to include it and how it illuminates your thinking.

## References

We consulted the following sources while producing this resource. Other sources may offer equally helpful advice on this topic; we encourage you to do your own research.

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