



Success Center Tips for Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Synthesizing Sources

Summarize Your Source

Summarizing information helps condense it for use in your own paper. A summary helps you understand the key ideas and content in an article, part of a book, or a cluster of paragraphs. It presents key ideas and information from a source concisely in your own writing without unnecessary detail that might distract readers. Summarizing is most useful when you wish to focus on the main ideas of a selection rather than specific details or steps of a process. When summarizing, be careful to use your own words, sentence structure, and phrasing to avoid inadvertent plagiarism. Also, remember to document the information in your paper.

STRATEGY: Prepare a summary.

- **Read.** Read the selection, looking for the key ideas, evidence, and information. Underline, highlight, or note these.
- **Scan.** Scan (reread) the selection to decide which of the ideas you've noted are the *most* important. Try also to identify the writer's main purpose and the major sections of the discussion.
- **Write (1).** Summarize each section (each stage in the argument or explanation) in a *single sentence* that notes the key ideas.
- **Write (2).** Summarize the entire passage in a *single sentence* that captures its main point.
- **Combine.** Combine your section summaries and overall summary.
- **Revise.** Rewrite for logic and ease of reading. Check against the source for accuracy.
- **Document.** Indicate clearly the source of your summary using a standard style of documentation (see MLA or APA handout).

Jennifer Figliozzi and Summer Arrigo-Nelson use two one-sentence summaries to help introduce the first research question in their paper.

First, research has shown that adolescents who have open and close relationships with their parents use alcohol less often than do those with conflictual relationships (Sieving, 1996). For example, a survey given to students in seventh through twelfth grades reported that approximately 35% of adolescent drinkers were under parental supervision while drinking (Dept. of Education, 1993).

Paraphrase Your Source

Paraphrasing material retains the original ideas and length of a selection but allows you to restructure the information and use your own voice. A good paraphrase doesn't add to or detract from the original material but may help you understand it by putting its content into your own words. Paraphrasing can be the answer when you want to incorporate detailed information in your writing without a dense or confusing quotation. Paraphrasing works well when ideas need clarification for your audience or when the style of the content isn't consistent with your writing style. When paraphrasing, be careful to use your own words, sentence structure, and phrasing to avoid inadvertent plagiarism. To paraphrase pictures, drawings, or graphics, you need to "extract" their information and concepts and "translate" the material into your own words. Also, remember to document the information in your paper.

STRATEGY: Prepare a paraphrase.

- **Read.** Read the selection carefully so that you understand the wording as well as the content.
- **Write.** Draft your paraphrase, using your own words and phrases in place of the original wording. Rely on synonyms and equivalent expressions. You can retain names, proper nouns, and the like.
- **Revise.** Rewrite for clarity. Change sentence structures and phrasing to make sure your version is easier to read than your source.
- **Document.** Indicate clearly the source of your paraphrase using a standard style of documentation (see MLA or APA handout).

Jennifer Figliozzi encountered the following passage in a report on current alcohol abuse programs at various schools.

The university also now notifies parents when their sons or daughters violate the alcohol policy, or any other aspect of the student code of conduct. "We were hoping that the support of parents would help change students' behavior, and we believe it has," says Timothy F. Brooks, an assistant vice-president and the dean of students.

Because she wanted to avoid long quotations and integrate the information smoothly, Jennifer paraphrased part of the passage, combining it with a brief quotation.

Officials at the University of Delaware thought that letting parents know when students violate regulations on alcohol use would alter students' drinking habits, and one administrator now says, "We believe it has" (Reisberg, 1998, A42).

Synthesize Your Sources

Synthesizing material in sources brings information together in new ways and helps you to interpret it for yourself and your audience. A synthesis can consolidate summaries of several sources and point out their relationships. It enables you to provide background, explore causes and effects, contrast explanations, or consolidate support for your thesis. Synthesis is a core component of the critical thinking and writing process.

STRATEGY: Prepare a synthesis of sources.

- **Identify.** Identify the role of a synthesis in your writing as well as the kind of information readers will need.
- **Read.** Gather and read your sources, preparing a summary of each.
- **Focus.** Decide on the purpose of your synthesis, and draft a summary of your conclusions about how the sources relate.
- **Arrange.** Select a sequence for the sources in your synthesis.
- **Write.** Draft your synthesis, combining your summaries of the sources with your conclusions about their relationships.
- **Revise.** Rewrite so that your synthesis is easy to read and readers can easily identify the sources of the various ideas.
- **Document.** Indicate clearly the sources for your synthesis using a standard style of documentation (see MLA or APA handout).

Work and public writing often use synthesis to identify a problem or a policy that needs to be examined. Similarly, many academic papers summarize prior research to identify the need for further research and justify research questions, as in the opening of Jennifer and Summer's paper.

Studies conducted with high school students have supported the hypothesis that positive family relationships are more likely to be associated with less frequent alcohol use among adolescents than are negative relationships. Adolescents model the limited substance use of their parents where there is a good or moderate parent-adolescent relationship (Andrews, Hops, & Duncan, 1997). Other factors the studies found to be associated with positive family relationships, along with substance use, were academic achievement, family structure, place of residence, self-esteem, and emotional tone (Weschler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995; Martsh & Miller, 1997).

Sources:

Anson, Chris M. et al. "Reading Critically, Evaluating, and Integrating Sources." *The Longman Writer's Companion*. Longman, 2003. (See pp. 251-253)

Maimon, Elaine P. et al. *A Writer's Resource*. 3rd ed., McGraw Hill, 2009. Print.