Using sources in academic contexts

When you write in academic contexts, particularly when it comes to extended essays, papers and theses, it is a requirement that you refer to and include source materials, be it from primary or secondary sources. The main reason for this is that you need to show that you are aware of your discipline's discourse and its impact on what you write, not only to demonstrate that you have acquainted yourself with the research and perspectives of others, but also to position your own research in this context. In your own writing, you need to acknowledge these other perspectives, and there are two common ways of doing this: either by using a quotation, or by using a paraphrase.

In academic writing, a quotation is commonly defined as a group of words (of any number) that has been directly taken from one text and incorporated into a different text written by somebody who is not the original writer. A paraphrase, in contrast, describes the action of expressing the meaning of another statement by using different words than the original text.

Quotation	Paraphrase
• exact, word-for-word reproduction of the original text • must not vary from the original in any way (e.g., must also include any spelling mistakes that appear in the original) • can be shortened by using three dots in square brackets • is surrounded by quotation marks and followed by a reference to the original source	• reproduction of the original text that intends to convey the meaning of the source, not its exact wording • can be stylistically and syntactically adapted to the new context • is not surrounded by quotation marks, but always followed by a reference to the original source

Should I paraphrase or quote?

Direct quotations should only be used if there is a good reason. Remember that your paper or essay is your own work, and therefore should also be written using your own voice and words. It must not be a collection of what others in your discipline have written, with one quotation following the next.

Using a quotation makes sense when

- you want to include a certain wording, for example when a text passage includes an important metaphor or is historically significant,
- you want to reproduce a particularly well-written text passage that would lose or change its meaning if you paraphrased or summarised it.

Using a paraphrase makes sense when

- you are interested in the idea that is expressed in the source, and not in the particular words that it is written in,
- you can summarise the key points of a source and thereby make your writing more concise,
- several sources give the same or a similar view and you can refer to them in one sentence.

Introducing a quotation or paraphrase

No matter whether you are using a quotation or a paraphrase, you need to connect them to your text, while at the same time clearly indicating which is which. Generally, this means that

- you give your readers a clear signal that they are dealing with a quotation or paraphrase (this means including the author's name and/or a reference to the source)
- you indicate how the quotation or paraphrase relates to your text (does it support your view, is it in contrast to your findings, does it illustrate a significant point?)

One good way of doing this is to precede paraphrases and quotations with introductory statements. The example below shows how you can do this in a concise manner and use transitional phrases to link the quotation to the introductory statement. Remember to use square three dots in square brackets if you want to leave out parts of the original statement:

> In his study of the middle classes in Victorian England, Miller points out that "becoming a governess was one of the few professions […] that were open to women". (Miller 2007: 43) He further claims that the protagonist of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* can be seen as "a typical embodiment of a young woman who becomes a governess out of the dire necessity to make a living, not out of a love for children." (ibid. 34)

If you wish to give a longer quote from a source, you need to pay particular attention to formatting, e.g. indenting the quotation (again, this differs between disciplines) and also include an introductory statement:

> In contrast to Miller, Smith (2009: 50) sees Jane's development as rather outstanding:
>
> > Even though Jane follows a fairly common route, from pupil to governess, the determination and strength which guide her on her way are anything but ordinary. In these early stages of her journey, Jane already allows the reader a first glimpse into a character that will later enable her to not only leave Rochester and the temptations of love behind, but also to resist Rivers when he confronts her with a very different, but equally tempting, offer.

In a paraphrase without a direct quotation, it could work like this:

> According to Smith (2009: 50), the development that Jane undergoes as she progresses from being a pupil at Lowood School to becoming a governess at Thornfield Hall might at first glance not seem extraordinary, but already reveals qualities, such as determination and mental strength, that make her an outstanding character.

When you write your essays and papers, you should always use quotations and paraphrases to good effect. Especially in science writing, conciseness is of the utmost importance, so do not overuse quotations! Some final tips:

- Always check your quotations for accuracy – they must not differ from the original source!
- Always indicate clearly where a quotation begins and ends: use quotation marks!
- Always give your references – if you forget to indicate your sources, you are committing plagiarism!
- Always remember to include every source you use in your list of references!

Further reading:

Bailey, Stephen (2011): *Academic Writing. A Handbook for International Students*. London: Routledge.

Hamp-Lyons, Liz M./Ben Heasley (2006): *Study Writing. A Course in Writing Skills for Academic Purposes.* Cambridge: University Press.

Matthews, Janice R./Robert W. Matthews (2009): *Successful Scientific Writing*. Cambridge: University Press.

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