University of Vermont Graduate Writing Center
Summarizing and Paraphrasing

Summarizing and Paraphrasing: What's the Difference

Summarizing and paraphrasing are two distinct writing skills that can help you avoid over-using quotations and make your writing smoother.

Summarizing means that you are taking an article and condensing the important point(s) into your own words. A summary will always be shorter than the original text. Think of it as though a friend asked you what you were reading: you would give them the highlights but likely would not get into specifics.

Paraphrasing is when you explain the text in your own words, but the level of detail is the same as the original. You may even use key words or statistics from the original text. Think of it as though you are discussing your research with a professor: they will likely want to know exactly what you found.

Examples of a Direct Quote, Summary, and Paraphrase

Original Quote

- "Nearly 54% of the articles were solely on captive red panda while 39% were solely related to the wild red panda. Six articles had studied both captive and wild red pandas, and the remaining five articles had not specified whether it was based on wild or captive populations. The last decade (2010–2020) recorded a slight shift from captive to wild red pandas, particularly with relatively more studies of wild red pandas in comparison to the captive ones in the last three years (2018–2020) Karki et al. 2021, p. 5).

Summary

- A review by Karki et al. (2021) found that more than half of red panda research was completed on captive populations, with an increase in wild population research over the past 10 years.

Paraphrase

- A review by Karki et al. (2021, p. 5) found several themes in red panda research. The researchers reported that 54% of research articles on red pandas were completed on captive populations and 39% on wild populations; however, from 2010-2020 there has been an increase in studies on wild red pandas.

Tips for Summarizing and Paraphrasing

Choose Appropriately

- Consider the purpose of the information you are including and how much detail you want. If you are writing your introduction and discussing previous research on your topic, summarizing is probably appropriate. If you are comparing your methods or results to another research article, you will want the level of detail that comes with paraphrasing.

Include Citations

- For both paraphrasing and summarizing, you will need both an in-text citation and full citation at the end of your paper. Of note, APA recommends (but does not require) that you include a page number within your in-text citation when paraphrasing.

Do Not Copy the Original

- When paraphrasing, make sure that your sentence structure is entirely different from the original. Here is an example of a paraphrase that too similar, and therefore plagiarizing:
    - "The researchers studied grass species in Texas, Arkansas, and California."
    - "Researchers examined grass species in Texas, Arkansas, and California."
- On a similar note, changing out a few words in a sentence is also plagiarism. In the last example "studied" was replaced with "examined," but overall, the sentence is the same.

Build New Sentences from Key Words/Statistics

- To avoid copying the original text, write down key words and statistics and then build an entirely new sentence around those words. From the panda article, you may note "54% captive, 39% wild, increase over the past decade". Taking notes in your own words can be a helpful way to create writing that differs from the original source.
- After you have your sentence, paste the original quote below and check for too much overlap. It is easy to accidentally plagiarize, especially with paraphrasing.