

the HUB

THINK. WRITE. SPEAK.

Source Usage: Key Terms and When to Cite

Using sources carefully is more than just crediting sources. It also means thinking about how you develop your own ideas through the use of those sources. However, this handout will help you to understand key vocabulary used by scholars who study source usage and student writing. Definitions are borrowed from The Citation Project (<http://www.citationproject.net>).

Quotation

“A passage in a student text that is (a) copied exactly and (b) marked as quotation, either by using quotation marks or by block indenting.”

Summary

“Restating and compressing the main points of an entire text or at least three or more consecutive sentences in the text, reducing the summarized passage by at least 50% and using 20% or less of the language from that passage.”

Paraphrase

“Restating a phrase, clause, or one or two sentences while using *no more than 20%* of the language of the source.”

Patchwriting

“Restating a phrase, clause, or one or more sentences while staying close to the *language* or *syntax* of the source.”

Patchwriting is an important concept. Scholars of writing studies, especially those who study student source usage, understand that patchwriting is regularly viewed as a step in a student’s education. Specifically, students who are novices when it comes to certain disciplinary content or writing expectations may patchwrite, even when they are attempting to put information and ideas into their own words (see Rebecca Moore Howard’s “Plagiarisms, Authorships, and the Academic Death Penalty”).

How can you avoid patchwriting?

- Really know your sources. It’s important to feel comfortable with the information, so take the time to read over the sources thoroughly and to think about the ideas on a



macro and micro level. Know what your sources mean when they stand alone and when they are placed in relation to other sources.

- Try writing out the information you want to use without looking at the original source. In short, try to write up what you want to say and only then go back and check the source. Vary sentence structure and not just word choice.
- Try speaking aloud what you want to say (again without looking at the source), and record what you say. Play it back and note whether the wording and sentence structure are close to the original source. Vary up your diction and syntax as needed.
- If you feel concerned about a section of your text, you can always visit the writing center and ask for feedback. Make sure to bring the original source as well as your own writing.
- Cite when summarizing or paraphrasing and not just when you're quoting.