

The Correct Use of Borrowed Information

Winthrop's policy on academic honesty is set out in "Section V, Academic Misconduct," of the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and what follows here is an elaboration on the policy on plagiarism contained in the *Student Code*. To complete a writing assignment, you may find it necessary to gather information by interviewing people; by reading books, magazines, journals, or other printed materials; by downloading material off the Internet; or by viewing and/or listening to films, tapes, plays, or some other formal or informal presentations. Such borrowed information usually appears in your writing as **paraphrases, direct quotations, or summaries**. However, correctly incorporating borrowed material into your own writing requires special skill. Improper use of borrowed information creates chaos in your essay; it also results in plagiarism, which means presenting someone else's ideas or words as your own. If you ever have any question about how you are handling a borrowed source, consult with your instructor **before** handing in the paper.

Plagiarism

Intentional plagiarism is a form of cheating. However, many students find themselves unintentionally presenting someone else's work as their own simply because these students do not know how to use borrowed information correctly. For example, students often do not know how to paraphrase properly and simply mix their own words and phrases with those in the original source without enclosing borrowed elements in quotation marks. Below you will find an example of a paragraph as it appeared in the original source--E. D. Hirsch's book *Cultural Literacy*--and definitions and examples of a paraphrase, a direct quotation, and a summary. Remember, failure to paraphrase, quote, or summarize correctly can constitute plagiarism. (You can find more information about avoiding plagiarism in the *Prentice Hall Reference Guide*, 5th ed., chapter 55c.)

The Original Paragraph (indented paragraph--that explains where the page # is)

The recently rediscovered insight that literacy is more than a skill is based upon knowledge that all of us unconsciously have about language. We know instinctively that to understand what somebody is saying, we must understand more than the surface meanings of words; we have to understand the context as well. The need for background information applies all the more to reading and writing. To grasp the words on a page we have to know a lot of information that isn't set down on the page. (3)

Definition of a Paraphrase

A paraphrase is a restatement in ***your own words*** and ***your own style*** of someone's ideas and discoveries. You must change both the ***words*** and the ***sentence structure*** of the original. Please remember that your purpose in using a paraphrase is not to save words because normally the

paraphrase is about the same length as the original. Your purpose, instead, is to express the borrowed information in a style that is your own and that is already familiar to your reader. (See *Prentice Hall*, 55a.)

Plagiarized Paraphrase

In his book *Cultural Literacy*, University of Virginia English professor and noted literacy theorist E. D. Hirsch argues that literacy is more than a skill. It is, instead, based upon what we know unconsciously about language. By instinct, we are aware that we must know more than the surface meaning of words; we must grasp the situation too. We also have to have this background information when we read and write. In other words, to understand the words on a page, we must know more than what is written on a page (3).

(The underlined words are lifted without change from the original paragraph. Note that several phrases were taken in their entirety and that elsewhere only minor changes were made.)

Correct Paraphrase

E. D. Hirsch, University of Virginia Professor of English and noted literacy theorist, reaffirms in his book *Cultural Literacy* that literacy is something other than just a "skill." Instead, it involves some things that we all know intuitively about the way words function. We realize that to decode what is said to us we must know more than the dictionary definitions of the individual words; in fact, we must also understand the situation in which the communication takes place. In order to read or write, we must be even more aware of the surrounding circumstances. Consequently, we have to know things other than the words themselves (3). Obviously, we need to consider many issues when we process language.

Definition of a Direct Quotation

A direct quotation is an exact repeating of someone else's words as he or she wrote or spoke them. (See *Prentice Hall*, 54d.)

Example of a Direct Quotation:

In *Cultural Literacy*, E. D. Hirsch, University of Virginia English professor and noted literacy theorist, persuasively argues that true literacy encompasses more than just recognizing words; he reminds us that "to understand what somebody is saying, we have to understand the context as well. The need for background information applies all the more to reading and writing. To grasp the words on a page we have to know a lot of information that isn't set down on the page" (3).

Definition of a Summary

A summary is simply a brief but accurate statement in your own words of the main idea(s) of some borrowed information. Brevity is the summary's reason for being, but a summary must give all of the main idea, not just half of it.

Example of a Summary:

E. D. Hirsch, University of Virginia English professor and noted literacy theorist, suggests in his book *Cultural Literacy* that a person must know more than the dictionary meanings of words to be truly literate; he or she must also understand significant information that precedes and surrounds the communication (3).

Work Cited

Hirsch, E. D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Incorporating Borrowed Material

Incorporating borrowed material into your own writing is not simply a matter of avoiding plagiarism. You must also create smooth transitions between your own words and ideas and those borrowed from other sources. These transitions should introduce and identify your sources and should evaluate the borrowed material. Frequently, inexperienced writers will simply drop a summary or a quotation into the middle of their own writing and rely on only a parenthetical citation to help the reader make sense of it. The following is an example of such a situation:

Unclear Incorporation

The 1980s and 1990s spawned a large number of books about the nature of communication. Some of these, like Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand*, are concerned with gender differences. Others, like Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways With Words*, deal with class and ethnicity. We must also remember that different communication situations require different strategies no matter what the gender, class, or ethnicity of the participants may be. If people know each other, their conversations can be more cryptic and not always simplistic. However, if they are unacquainted and know nothing of each other's background, they have to explain a great deal to be understood (Hirsch 4).

While this citation gives credit to Hirsch for borrowed ideas and, consequently, does not constitute plagiarism, it nevertheless creates several difficulties for the reader. In the first place, the reader does not know where the borrowing from Hirsch begins. A second problem is that the

reader knows practically nothing about Hirsch's identity or his credentials. Finally, the reader doesn't know whether the writer is agreeing with Hirsch or disagreeing.

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Hirsch, E. D., Jr. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

One of the most difficult tasks facing the writer of documented papers is to distinguish clearly between his or her own voice and the voices of the various authorities whose words and ideas are being incorporated into the paper. In order to accomplish this goal, writers should make sure that they do the following:

- Your source should always be introduced by name in the text rather than just in the parenthetical citation. This procedure must be followed when introducing quotations, but it is even more important when introducing paraphrased or summarized material. With quotations, the reader knows when the writer has begun to borrow because all the material is set off by quotation marks or indentation. With paraphrased or summarized material, only an introductory citation of the source's name will show the reader where the borrowed material has begun.
- The first time a source is introduced by name, it is important for the writer to identify this person, preferably by establishing the source's credentials as an authority on the subject under discussion. Authors vary widely in their degree of expertise, and it is up to you to justify to the reader your inclusion of a particular source's opinions. After the source has been identified once, it is not necessary to cite the credentials of that same person in subsequent references.
- Your paper may cite opinions on both sides of an issue: some you will oppose; some you will endorse. If you are writing an argument, it is absolutely crucial for the reader to know in which category any of the borrowed material belongs. Often writers believe that

their position is obvious, but readers do not always find it to be. One easy way to make the matter clear is to include an evaluative adverb or other signal phrase in your introduction to the borrowed material. For example, rather than saying, "Hirsch states," you might say, "Hirsch persuasively argues," or "Hirsch unrealistically claims." (For a list of frequently used signal phrases, see *PH*, 55b.)

[Click here to print out this pledge on a separate sheet to turn in to your instructor.](#)

I have read this discussion and the appropriate sections in the *Prentice Hall Reference Guide to Grammar and Usage* and understand that I am responsible for using borrowed material correctly in my writing. I am also aware of the penalties for plagiarism as stated in *The Student Code of Conduct* and on my instructor's syllabus.
