

As it turns out, there are only four ways to use other people's ideas. Three of them are ethical: summary, paraphrase, & quotation. The fourth one, plagiarism, which we also call "stealing", is always unethical.

If you're using someone else's ideas, that means you're using one of these methods. So I'm gonna tell you about them, and give you some suggestions about how to use each one. This is gonna be a quick overview, so buckle up. [Metaphorically. Unless you're driving, in which case, buckle up for real. Ahem.]

Summary takes something big and shrinks it down, so you can reduce a big ol' tome like Moby Dick down to "A madman hunts a whale, gets everyone killed." Long book, shrunk into a sentence. Note that these are all my own words: that sentence does not appear in Mody Dick. Apart from that, make sure to attribute the thing you summarized using a citation style of some kind (kapow), and you're done.

Summary is good when you want to refer to something big and complicated, but don't want to give your audience a reading assignment. So you share just the stuff that matters.

Paraphrase is like summary, except instead of taking a big idea and making it small, you take something that's already small, and change the words while keeping the meaning. And, you know, include a citation.

Paraphrase is good for sharing information when the exact original words don't matter, and might even be a distraction. You wanna paraphrase when the other person's ideas, not their exact words, are what you want to share. In this case, the flowery, archaic language and lack of context could make this sentence confusing. Who's the "I", and where exactly is Hell's heart, and why does that matter? This paraphrase gets the same idea across, without letting the language get in the way.

Quotation is the exact reproduction of someone else's language, a perfect copy. To quote, you copy the text you want, throw quotation marks at either end, and, of course, include a citation.

Quoting is easy to do, but that doesn't mean it's easy to do right. It's like swearing. The trick is knowing when it's appropriate. Swear in the right situation, it really helps drive your point home. Swear in the wrong situation, and your grandma writes you out of the will.

Basically, you wanna quote when the other person's exact words, not the ideas behind them, are what you want to share. Because those words are beautiful, or so well-chosen and

complicated that you don't trust yourself to rephrase anything. Think of quotation as a last resort, only to be used when neither paraphrase nor summary will do.

Plagiarism, or stealing, involves taking someone else's ideas or language and passing it off as your own, either deliberately or by accident. That means summary, paraphrase, and quotation can all become plagiarism if you don't give credit where credit is due. The fancy word for that is attribution, and it's the key. Here's a paraphrase from a critical analysis of Moby Dick. If I include it in my paper without clearly indicating whose idea it is, it could look like I'm passing it off as my own, which is plagiarism. See? Plagiarism. Not plagiarism. Plagiarism. Not plagiarism. The difference is attribution.

So why plagiarize? Usually, to save time. It's an attempt to have your cake and eat it, too. If you plagiarize, you can go to that big party AND hand in your paper on time. But here's where plagiarism breaks down. It's a high-risk, low-reward proposition, that doesn't pay off even when you get away with it. Because all you're really doing is compromising your own education, which costs a lot of time and money. And of course it's worse if you get caught. So please don't abuse other people's ideas. Instead, stop by your friendly library and get some help with that paper.