Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing

Anytime you want to incorporate the words or ideas of an outside source into your own writing, you must be very careful to avoid plagiarism, the unauthorized use of someone else’s work. Whether your use of a given source involves a direct quote, a paraphrase, or a summary, you must be sure to properly cite that source (using MLA, APA, Chicago, or some other set of standards).

Direct quotes come in three varieties: 1) words or phrases integrated into your sentences, 2) complete sentences integrated your paragraphs, and 3) block quotations of several lines.

1) In The Little Penguin Handbook, Lester Faigley notes that outside sources are meant to "support" an author’s ideas rather than "say it for [him or her]."¹

2) According to Faigley, "The purpose of using sources is to support what you have to say, not to say it for you."¹

3) On the subject of consulting outside sources, The Little Penguin Handbook urges caution:

   The purpose of using sources is to support what you have to say, not to say it for you. Next to plagiarism, the worst mistake you can make with sources is to string together a series of long quotations. This strategy leaves your readers wondering whether you have anything to say.¹

As a general rule, only include direct quotations in your writing when the original author’s exact wording is particularly important. In most cases, short statements should be paraphrased (as in A below), and longer passages should be summarized (as in B).

A) The use of outside sources can strengthen a writer’s argument, but only as long as the writer keeps his or her original voice. The overuse of direct quotations is not quite as bad as plagiarism, but it is a very serious mistake nonetheless.¹

B) Lester Faigley believe that writers should never use outside sources speak for them, only to verify facts and support opinions.¹

Tips for Paraphrase and Summary:

- Look for key ideas and details that are relevant to your paper. Take notes while you read.
- Read the original passage, think about it, and then write down your interpretation from memory.
- Be careful not to misrepresent the original author’s ideas.
- If you really can’t find a way to change some of the original author’s wording, just use a direct quote instead.
- Always cite your sources.