Using Sources: Quote vs. Paraphrase

Academic writing places importance on sources, research, and backing for claims. Below are suggestions for ways of incorporating sources into your writing.* *(with material taken from Melissa Walker's Writing Research Papers)*

When you use a QUOTE, you are taking someone else's exact words (77). That means you should put "'"s around any words which aren't your own, including phrases or fancy terms that your subject uses. To use someone else's expressions or manner of speaking for your own is PLAGIARIISM (and big trouble—see the AU policy statement).

Quotations can make a paper interesting and can reveal a lot about your subject. But quotations should be used sparingly. A few well-chosen quotes enliven your paper. Big blocks of quotation or excessive quoting can kill it. Walker says, "ask yourself what purpose the quotation will serve and whether it would be better to express the idea in your own words" (78).

What should I quote?
- A statement so effectively expressed you can't paraphrase it
- An authoritative voice which enhances your credibility
- Someone else's position in his/her own words
- Dialogue -- for effect

Whenever you use quotations, take care to integrate the quoted words into your paper smoothly. Don't just drop in a quote -- surround it with material that explains why it is there and how we should use it.
- Don't just "quote and run." Follow up any quote with some explanation or analysis of how the quote supports or illustrates your point.
- Resist the temptation to let a quote open or end your paragraph. Relying on someone else's words to make your point for you reduces your credibility.
- Introduce quotes with signal phrases. You need to "signal" the reader when your ideas end and someone else’s ideas begin; tell who is speaking (and maybe why you are "letting them speak"); using verbs such as argues, remarks, charges.

When you PARAPHRASE, on the other hand, you capture the sense of a statement in your own words. Or, as Walker puts it, "to convey accurately the ideas, facts, or attitudes of someone else in words that are natural to you" (78). You can actually clarify something that's confusing--or make a complicated discussion more concise for your reader by paraphrasing rather than quoting your source. Remember: if we wanted to read everything this person said about the topic, we could go read the source itself!

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