

Using Summaries, Paraphrases, and Quotations: A Supplemental Guide

The following information and examples are intended to supplement the MLA guidelines on quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing in Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual* (pp. 103-154 in the 5th edition). Also, although the examples below use literary works, the "logic" of quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, and citing is the same across arguments, genres, or types of sources.

A Few Quoting Rules of Thumb:

- When quoting, do so accurately, and understand both the meaning and the context of the quotation.
- Do not fill your paper with quotations. Use them only when the author or speaker has written or said something in a distinctive or interesting way. In other words, quotations are one of several valid ways to support what you write; they should not constitute the majority of your work.
- Name the author or speaker, when possible or relevant.
- Provide, when relevant or available, the author's or speaker's credentials or relationship to the topic or issue.
- When available, provide the page number(s) at the end of the quotation, in parentheses.

Here's an excerpt from a student's paper about Elie Wiesel's Holocaust-survival narrative, *Night*:

... One the most troubling scenes in *Night*, in fact, is when Wiesel and the other Jews are on the train to the concentration camp. After being separated from her husband and two oldest sons, Madame Schächter, a fellow prisoner, begins to go mad. Wiesel writes, "On the third night, while we slept, some of us sitting one against the other and some standing, a piercing cry split the silence: 'Fire! I can see a fire! I can see a fire!'" (22). The other prisoners don't see fire, but Madame Schächter's vision is a dark omen of the terrible fate awaiting the Jews: the gas chambers and ovens at Auschwitz.

- Inside the quotation marks, the student has written Wiesel's exact words. Nothing is changed.
- The citation/page number (22) comes at the end of the quotation, outside the quotation marks.
- There is a " mark starting the quotation and a " mark ending the quotation, but there is also have a ' and a ' inside the quotation, because of a quotation *inside* a quotation: The student is quoting Wiesel, who is quoting Madame Schächter.
- Notice that the period, the one that ends the whole sentence, is at the very end. It's the last punctuation mark: (22). (When you're quoting, commas, periods, and semi-colons almost always get dropped; question marks and exclamation points usually remain.)
- The student uses present tense verbs in the "writes" or "says" clause: "Wiesel **writes**," not "Wiesel **wrote**," for example.

Here's another example from later in the same paper (which was about Wiesel's *Night* and Spiegelman's *Maus*):

Vladek certainly displays a number of admirable characteristics over the course of *Maus*; unfortunately, however, tolerance is not one of them. He has survived the concentration camps—perhaps the absolute worst expression of racism in history—but Vladek is, unfortunately, a racist. For instance, when Françoise picks up a hitch-hiker, Vladek's narrow-minded attitude is quite obvious. The hitch-hiker walks toward the car, and Vladek yells to Françoise, “A hitch-hiker? And—oy—it's a colored guy, a shvartser! Push quick on the gas!” (98). Immediately after they drop off the hitch-hiker, Vladek questions Françoise: “What happened on you, Françoise? You went crazy, or what?!” He adds, “I had the whole time to watch out that this shvartser doesn't steal us the groceries from the back seat!” (99). When Françoise confronts Vladek, pointing out that he displays the same attitude toward African-Americans that the Nazis displayed toward the Jews, Vladek does not see the contradiction in his thinking (99). “It's not even to compare,” he huffs, “the shvartsers and the jews!” (99). Further demonstrating his inability to tolerate difference, Vladek also has to have the last word. At the end of the scene, just after he has exclaimed, “Better we'll just forget it,” Vladek himself adds, “Only thank God that your shvartser didn't take them” (100). Perhaps Vladek is too far gone; Artie and Françoise don't respond because they know they'll never change his narrow-minded, racist attitude.

- The student paraphrased what Françoise says—she didn't write her exact words. So, she did not use quotation marks around that clause. However, she still provided a page number, in parentheses at the end of the sentence, to show readers where the paraphrased information came from. Just like a quotation, paraphrases and summaries need citations.
- Instead of writing “says” every time, the student used stronger verbs: **yells**, **questions**, **adds**, **huffs**.
- The placement of the “says” clause is varied. Notice how **he huffs**, came in the middle of the quotation that time?
- The quotations are “grounded” every time. They are not “floating.” In other words, all quotations have a “says” clause holding them in the paragraph every time they appear.
- In a 4-6 page paper, quotations longer than 4 typed lines (as they appear typed out in your paper, not the original) are not necessary. If you find you need to include such a large section of information, paraphrase or summarize the material instead.