# Chapter 5: Quoting, Paraphrasing, Avoiding Plagiarism, and Using AI

## Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, readers will be able to:

1. Apply basic strategies for summarizing, quoting, and paraphrasing research in their writing.
2. Define plagiarism and explain how to avoid it in their research.
3. Apply appropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI) as a writing tool and recognize its limitations, such as “hallucinations”.

## Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to introduce some basic strategies for summarizing, quoting and paraphrasing research in your writing and to explain how to avoid plagiarizing your research. Learning how to effectively quote and paraphrase research can be difficult, and it certainly takes practice. Hopefully, your research abilities will improve as you work through this book and gain other research writing experience.

## How to Summarize: An Overview

A summary is a brief explanation of a longer text. Some summaries, like those in annotated bibliographies, are very short--just a sentence or two, while others are much longer. Summaries are always shorter than the text being summarized

Summaries of different lengths are useful in research writing because you, the writer, often need to provide readers with an explanation of the text being discussed. Summaries are especially important when you are going to quote or paraphrase from a source.

Of course, the first step in writing an effective summary is to complete a thorough reading of the text you are going to summarize. Here are a few basic guidelines to follow when you write summary material:

* **Stay “neutral” in your summarizing.** Summaries provide “just the facts” and are not the place to offer your opinions about the text you are summarizing. Save your opinions and evaluation of the evidence you are summarizing for other parts of your writing.
* **Don’t quote from what you are summarizing.** Summaries will be more impactful if you write them in your own words.
* **Don’t “cut and paste” from database abstracts.** Many of the periodical indexes that are available as part of your library’s computer system include abstracts of articles. Do not “cut” this abstract material and then “paste” it into your own annotated bibliography--that is plagiarism! Additionally, “cutting and pasting” from the abstract defeats one of the purposes of writing summaries and creating an annotated bibliography, which is to help you understand and explain your research.

## How to Quote and Paraphrase: An Overview

Writers quote and paraphrase from research to support their points and to persuade their readers. A quote or a paraphrase from a piece of evidence in support of a point answers the reader’s question, “Says who?”

Attribution and citation are especially important in academic writing since scholarly readers are most persuaded by effective research and evidence. For example, readers of an article about a new cancer medication published in a medical journal will be most interested in the scholar’s research and statistics that demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatment. Conversely, they will not be as persuaded by emotional stories from patients about how a new cancer medication improved the quality of their lives. While this appeal to emotion can be effective and is common in popular sources, these anecdotes do not carry the same sort of “scholarly” or scientific value as well-reasoned, unbiased research, and evidence.

Your instructor is not expecting you to be an expert on the topic of your research paper. While you might conduct primary research, you’ll be relying on secondary sources like books, articles, and websites to inform and persuade your readers. You’ll present this research to your readers in the form of quotes and paraphrases.

A “quote” is a direct restatement of the exact words from the original source. The general rule of thumb is that any time you use three or more words as they appeared in the original source, you should treat it as a quote. A “paraphrase” is a restatement of the information or point of the original source in your own words.

While quotes and paraphrases are distinctive and should be used in different ways in your research writing (as the examples in this section suggest), they do have several things in common. Both quotes and paraphrases should

* be “introduced” to the reader, particularly the first time you mention a source;
* include an explanation of the evidence explaining why you think the evidence is important, especially if it is not apparent from the context of the quote or paraphrase; and
* include a proper citation of the source.

The method you should follow to properly quote or paraphrase depends on the style guide you are following in your academic writing. The two most common style guides used in academic writing are the Modern Language Association (MLA), and the American Psychological Association (APA). Other common styles are Turabian, Chicago, and CSE. Your instructor will probably assign one of these styles before you begin working on your project; however, if your instructor doesn’t mention this, be sure to ask.

## When to Quote, When to Paraphrase

The real “art” to research writing is using quotes and paraphrases from evidence effectively to support your point. There are certain rules, dictated by the rules of style you are following, like the ones presented by the MLA or the ones presented by the APA. You will find certain guidelines and suggestions in this textbook and will learn others from teachers and colleagues.

Deciding when to quote and when to paraphrase depends on the specific context of the writing and the effect you are trying to achieve. Learning the best times to quote and paraphrase takes practice and experience.

In general, it is best to use a quote when

* **The exact words of your source are important for the point you are trying to make**. This is especially true if you are quoting technical language, terms, or very specific word choices.
* **You want to highlight your *agreement* with the author’s words**. If you agree with the point the author of the evidence makes and you like their exact words, quote them.
* **You want to highlight your *disagreement* with the author’s words**. In other words, you may sometimes want to use a direct quote to indicate exactly what it is you disagree about. This might be particularly true when you are considering the antithetical positions in your research writing projects.

In general, it is best to paraphrase when

* **There is no compelling reason to use a quote to refer to your evidence**. If the author’s exact words are not especially important to the point you are trying to make, paraphrase the evidence.
* **You are trying to explain a particular piece of evidence to explain or interpret it in more detail**, particularly in writing projects like critiques.
* **You need to balance a direct quote in your writing**. Be mindful of directly quoting your research *too*much because it can become difficult to read prose. Choosing to paraphrase instead of a quote helps create balance within your writing.

### Tips for Quoting and Paraphrasing

* **Introduce** your quotes and paraphrases to your reader, especially on first reference.
* **Explain**the significance of the quote or paraphrase to your reader.
* **Cite** your quote or paraphrase properly according to the rules of style you are following in your essay.
* **Quote when**the exact words are important, when you want to highlight your agreement or your disagreement.
* **Paraphrase when** the exact words aren’t important, when you want to explain the point of your evidence, or when you need to balance the direct quotes in your writing.

### Four Examples of Quotes and Paraphrases

Here are four examples of properly quoting and paraphrasing evidence in your research essays. In each case, you’ll be presented with a **BAD**example, or the way **NOT**to quote or paraphrase.

#### Quoting in APA Style

Here’s the first **BAD** example of a writer attempting to follow APA style rules:

“If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage.” (Repetto, 2001, p. 84).

In this example the researcher hasn’t done any of the necessary work to explain this quote’s origin or to explain why it is important for supporting her point. Rather, the quote was “dropped in,”, leaving the interpretation of its significance up to the reader. Further, it doesn’t follow the proper APA citation style.

Here is a revision that is a **GOOD**or at least **BETTER**example:

Repetto (2001) concludes that in the case of the scallop industry, those running the industry should be held responsible for not considering methods that would curtail the problems of over-fishing. “If the U.S. scallop fishery were a business, its management would surely be fired, because its revenues could readily be increased by at least 50 percent while its costs were being reduced by an equal percentage” (p. 84).

The research writer has introduced and explained the point of the evidence and introduced a clarifying sentence. This example follows the rules of APA style. APA style prefers that the research writer refer to the author only by last name followed immediately by the year of publication. Whenever possible, begin your citation with the author’s last name and the year of publication, and, in the case of a direct quote like this passage, the page number (including the “p.”) in parentheses at the end.

#### Paraphrasing in APA Style

Consider first this **BAD**example of what **NOT**to do in paraphrasing from a source in APA style:

Computer criminals have lots of ways to get away with credit card fraud (Cameron, 2002).

The main problem with this paraphrase is there isn’t enough information here to adequately explain to the reader what the point of the evidence really is. Remember: your readers have no way of automatically knowing why you as a research writer think that a particular piece of evidence is useful in supporting your point. This is why it is key that you introduce and explain your evidence.

Here is a revision that is **GOOD**or at least **BETTER:**

Cameron (2002) points out that computer criminals intent on committing credit card fraud are able to take advantage of the fact that there aren’t enough officials working to enforce computer crimes. Criminals are also able to use the technology to their advantage by communicating via email and chat rooms with other criminals.

Again, this revision is better because the additional information introduces and explains the point of the evidence. In this particular example, the author’s name is also incorporated into the explanation of the evidence as well. In APA, it is preferable to weave in the author’s name into your essay, usually at the beginning of a sentence. However, it would also have been acceptable to end an improved paraphrase with just the author’s last name and the date of publication in parentheses.

## How to Avoid Plagiarism in the Research Process

Plagiarism is the unauthorized or uncredited use of the writings or ideas of another in your writing. While it might not be as tangible as auto theft or burglary, plagiarism is still a form of theft.

In the academic world, plagiarism is a serious matter because ideas in the forms of research, creative work, and original thought are highly valued. Chances are, your school has strict rules about what happens when someone is caught plagiarizing. The penalty for plagiarism is severe, everything from a failing grade for the plagiarized work, a failing grade for the class, or expulsion from the university or academic institution.

You might not be aware that plagiarism can take several different forms. The most well-known, **purposeful plagiarism**, is handing in an essay written by someone else and representing it as your own, copying your essay word for word from a magazine or journal, or downloading an essay from the Internet.

A much more common and less understood phenomenon **accidental plagiarism.** Accidental plagiarism is the result of improperly paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting, or citing your evidence in your academic writing. Generally, writers accidentally plagiarize because they don't know the rules, they are careless and don't look up the rules, or they fail to follow the rules for giving credit to the ideas of others.

Both purposeful and accidental plagiarism are unethical, against the rules, and can result in harsh punishments. Ignoring or not familiarizing yourself with the rules of how to not plagiarize and properly cite evidence might be an *explanation,*but it is not an *excuse.*

Consider the examples below that use quotations and paraphrases from this brief passage:

Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties. Rock started out as an Anglo-American phenomenon and has become an industry. Nonetheless, it was able to capture the hopes of young people around the world and provided enjoyment to those of us who listened to or played rock. Sixties pop was the conscience of one or two generations that helped bring the war in Vietnam to a close. Obviously, neither rock nor pop has solved global poverty or hunger. But is this a reason to be “against” them? (ix).

And just to make it clear that this passage is not plagiarized, here is the citation in APA style:

Lévy, P. (2001). *Cyberculture*. United Kingdom: University of Minnesota Press.

Here’s an obvious example of plagiarism:

Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties.

In this case, the writer has literally taken one of Lévy’s sentences and represented it as their own, clearly defying the rules.

Here’s another less obvious example of plagiarism:

The same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people.

While these aren’t Lévy’s exact words, they are certainly close enough to constitute a form of plagiarism. And again, even though you might think that this is a “lesser” form of plagiarism, it’s still plagiarism.

Both passages can easily be corrected to make them acceptable quotations or paraphrases.

**In the introduction of his book *Cyberculture*, Pierre Lévy observes that** **“**Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties**” (ix).**

**Pierre Lévy suggests**that the same kind of people who criticize cyberculture are the same kind of people who criticized rock and roll music back in the fifties and sixties. But both cyberculture and rock music inspire and entertain young people **(ix).**

Note that changing these passages from examples of plagiarism to acceptable examples of a quotation and a paraphrase is extremely easy: properly cite your sources.

This leads to the “golden rule” of avoiding plagiarism:

Always cite your sources. If you are unsure if you should or should not cite a particular claim or reference, err on the side of caution and cite your source.

Often, students are unclear as to whether or not they need to cite a piece of evidence because they believe it to be “common knowledge” or because they are not sure about the source of information. When in doubt about whether or not to cite evidence in order to give credit to a source (“common knowledge” or not), you should cite the evidence.

### Plagiarism and the Internet

Sometimes, I think the ease of finding and retrieving information online makes readers think that this information does not need to be cited. After all, it isn’t a traditional source like a book or a journal; it is available for “free.” All a research writer needs to do with a web site is “cut and paste” whatever he needs into his essay, right? Wrong!

**You need to cite the evidence you find from the Internet the same way you cite evidence from other sources.** To not do this is plagiarism, or, more bluntly, cheating. Just because the information is “freely” available does not mean you can use this information without properly citing it, much in the same way that the information from library journals and books “freely” available to you needs to be cited to give credit where credit is due.

It is also not acceptable to simply download graphics from the internet. Images found online are protected by copyright laws. Taking images from the internet (particularly from commercial sources) is an offense that could lead to legal action. There are places where you can find graphics and clip art that online publishers have made publicly available for anyone to use, but be sure that the website where you find the graphics makes this explicit before you take graphics as your own.

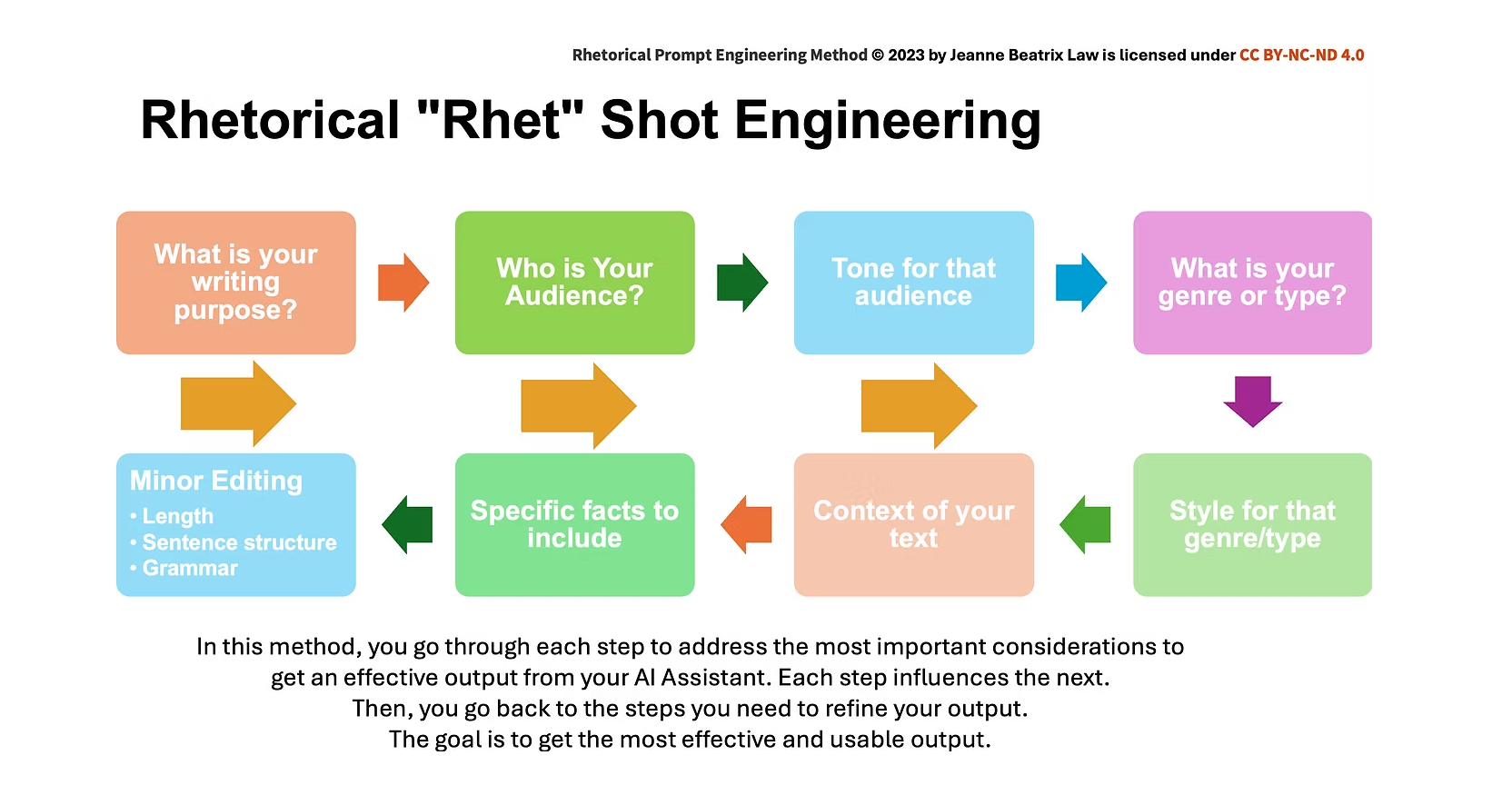
In short, you can use evidence from the internet as long as you don’t plagiarize and as long as you properly cite it; don’t take graphics from the internet unless you know the images are in the public domain. For more information on citing electronic sources, explore the [Purdue Online Writing Lab’s guide to APA style](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/index.html).

### Artificial Intelligence or AI

Is using AI cheating? If your professor says not to use it, then don’t use it or it is unethical to do so. But perhaps your professor says you can use it to brainstorm or outline. Perhaps your professor also says you can use it to summarize sources or edit what you have written. Follow the guidelines—and restrictions—given to you by your professor.

Likely no one will tell you to just put a prompt into your chosen AI and turn in what it spits out. As you are probably aware, AI isn’t perfect. Many of the programs provide information that is commonly called “hallucinations.” You ask for a summary of 10 sources on a topic, it provides them, and you turn it in to your professor. Your professor grades the paper, and you earn a failing grade. It turns out, of the 10 sources, 8 were fake—fake authors, fake journals, fake summaries. AI just hallucinated the information. If you don’t double check behind the AI, then you might fall victim to its hallucinations.

If your professor allows you to use AI—either with or without restrictions—you are responsible for what you turn in. One way to use AI as a writing assistant is to use what is called the “Rhetorical Prompt Engineering Framework.” That is, the writer prompts AI with the purpose, audience, tone, genre, style, context, and specific facts to include. Then, the writer reviews the output and asks the AI for specific revisions—maybe editing for length or tone. The writer again reviews the output and asks for further revisions or editing for grammar, length, or sentence structure. The image below shows Dr. Jeanne Law’s Rhetorical “Rhet” Shot Engineering method (2024).



*Figure 1: Rhetorical “Rhet” Shot Engineering method by Dr. Jeanne Beatrix Law*

The goal of working with AI through these rhetorical shots is to get your writing about 80% of where you want it to be. That means you are responsible for reading through the output, verifying the accuracy, and adding the information needed to bring your writing 100% of the way to a finished, usable, and high-quality document. If you didn’t do the initial research yourself, and if you don’t know much about technical communication, you may not be able to bring your document to 100%. AI is a tool. It is not a substitute for human skill and knowledge.

So, is AI cheating? Again, it depends on your professor’s policies. But if AI is allowed, it’s up to you to make sure what you use AI to assist you with is accurate, clear, and usable.

## References

Law, J. (2024, April 1) Rhetorical "rhet shots:" mastering the recursive dynamics of the rhetorical "rhet" shot prompt engineering method in collaboration with your AI assistant. Prompt4All. <https://prompt4all.wixsite.com/prompt4all/post/rhetorical-rhet-shots-mastering-the-recursive-dynamics-of-the-rhetorical-rhet-shot-prompt-engin>

## Attribution

This chapter is revised from Steven D. Krause’s *The Process of Research Writing*, Chapter 3: “[Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism](http://stevendkrause.com/tprw/chapter3.html)”, which is openly available under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

## AI Assistance Notice

Some parts of this chapter were brainstormed, drafted, and/or revised in conversation with ChatGPT 4o and Google Gemini 2.5 Flash. All AI-generated content was reviewed and revised as needed by a human author.