Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing in MLA Style

Knowing when to quote versus when to paraphrase
Referring to outside sources lends authority and credibility to your writing; however, quoting too much in a single paper makes your writing sound choppy and can give readers the impression that you don’t understand what you are saying, that you’re just repeating something you’ve heard or read. Below are some guidelines, adapted from the *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers* 7th ed. (pp. 538-544), for knowing when and how much to quote:

**Quote:** incorporate the author’s words exactly as they appear in the source, set them off with quotation marks, and list the author’s last name and the page number on which the quote appears in parentheses at the end of your sentence. The period goes after the end parenthesis.

Example: “To plagiarize is to present another person’s words or ideas as if they were your own. Plagiarism, like stealing, is a form of academic dishonesty or cheating” (Troyka 540).

General rules of thumb:
- Quote only when:
  o the author has a unique or especially eloquent way of stating the information you want to include.
  o the author has a clear, concise way of stating the information you want to include.
  o the author’s status or credentials will lend authority to your work.
  o the author’s words are something you plan to analyze.
- Keep your quotes as brief as possible so you don’t interrupt the flow of your writing.
- Don’t just plunk the quote in your paper and expect the reader to understand its significance. Think of “sandwiching” the quote: lead into it by explaining its context, insert the quote, then explain how it supports the point you are making.

**Paraphrase:** restate the author’s ideas in your own words and sentence structures; list the author’s name and the text’s year of publication in parentheses at the end of your sentence. Be careful not to change just one or two words; you should put the idea in words you would use to explain the same idea to someone else.

Example: Students who include someone else’s words in their writing and try to pass those words off as their own are plagiarizing. What’s more, they are not only dishonest, they are cheating, and essentially, stealing (Tryoka 540).

General rules of thumb:
- Paraphrase when the idea you are explaining is particularly complicated or intricate.
- Be sure you are truly paraphrasing and not just substituting one or two words.
**Summarize:** condense the author’s main ideas and explain them in your own words. List the author’s name and the text’s year of publication in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

Example: Students who write something using another person’s words, pretending that they wrote it are not only being deceitful but also stealing (Troyka 540).

General rules of thumb:
- Summarize when the author’s point is fairly self-explanatory and his or her exact words aren’t especially important.
- Summarizing works well when you want to establish the general context for one idea that you want to examine in greater detail.

**Works Cited**