Patchwriting vs. Effective Summary

Patchwriting means "restating a phrase, clause, or one or more sentences while staying close to the language or syntax of the source" (Jamieson & Howard, 2011). Here is an example:

Original passage

Studies about everyday experts ranging from doctors to pilots to loan officers suggest that it's actually automaticity that tends to separate the highly experienced expert from the novice, rather than the ability to eventually come to the right conclusion (Freedman, 2010, p. 35).

Patchwritten paragraph

Freedman (2010) says studies about everyday experts show that it's actually automaticity that separates experts from novices, rather than the ability to come to the right conclusion (p. 35).

Effective summary

According to Freedman (2010), studies show us the main advantage experts have over novices is not capability but "automaticity" (p. 35).

If you have learned to patchwrite, it is now time to move beyond patchwriting toward effectively summarizing your source material. If you want to be sure you are summarizing your source's information ethically, *read the source, understand the source, close the source, and write your own words*. To help you do this, consider the following exercise, adapted from one created by writing scholar Rebecca Moore Howard (1995, p. 801).

Try these steps with an article or passage you want to summarize:

1. Read the source once through, quickly, perhaps reading only the first sentence of each paragraph if there are several or more paragraphs.
2. Reread the source, this time a little more slowly to get details.
3. Read the source a third time, taking notes.
4. Let some time elapse, perhaps a half-hour.
5. With the source closed, write your own summary of the information you are using.
6. Look at the source again to see if any of your phrasing is similar.
7. If so, consider quoting those phrases if the author's words are particularly important, and if not, revising them. Remember to use quotation marks. Periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks; other punctuation goes inside only if part of the quotation.
8. Include attributions tags, such as "according to . . . ," and in-text citations.
9. What is the purpose of including this information? Make sure your reason is clear in your paper.
10. Check your summary:
    - ✓ Did you write the information in your own words with the source out of sight?
    - ✓ Does your summary accurately represent the source's meaning?
    - ✓ Do your attribution tags, quotation marks, and citations clearly indicate whose words and ideas are whose?
    - ✓ Do you cite page numbers after information or quotes from specific parts of the source?

LWC Writing Center

Slider 200, 270-384-8209   •   Every Writer, Every Message, Every Point in the Process   •   Welcome to the Conversation!

Patchwriting vs. Effective Summary

Genre Exceptions

Occasionally, you may need to use source material that is so specialized and information dense that writing the material in other words would be dangerous, ineffective, or impossible. This can apply to drug information sheets, product labels, or other genres that sometimes strictly follow models, such as handouts, contracts, charters, or mission statements. In these cases, if quoting is inappropriate, consult your field's style manual, but it may be best to credit the source using an acknowledgment such as "Adapted from . . ." or "Modeled after . . . ."

References

Freedman, D.H. (2010). Wrong: Why experts keep failing us—and how to know when not to trust them. New York: Little, Brown, and Company.

Howard, R.M. (1995). Plagiarisms, authorships, and the academic death penalty. *College English 57*, 788-806.

Jamieson, S. & Howard, R.M. (2011). What is plagiarism?. In *The citation project*. Retrieved from http://site.citationproject.net/?page_id=32

LWC Writing Center

Slider 200, 270-384-8209   •   Every Writer, Every Message, Every Point in the Process   •   Welcome to the Conversation!