

Research

The most effective way to demonstrate your mastery of a subject is to be able to write clearly and convincingly about it. You must do this in many courses. As a writer, you will use facts, statistics, and authoritative opinions gleaned from your research to support your position. This section of the guide will help you in the process.

Gathering Information and Note Taking

We have chosen an excerpt from an article in Smithsonian magazine to demonstrate forms of note taking. After reading the article, you will find examples of **paraphrase**, **summary**, and **direct quote** formats. Be sure to take down bibliographic information on any source from which you take notes as we have done in the examples below. Page numbers are essential because you will use them when you cite your sources.

Lipske, Michael. "Forget Hollywood: These Bloodthirsty Beauties Are For Real."
Smithsonian. December 1992, 48+.

"The areas are so fascinating they just kind of grab you and take you over," says George Folkerts, an Auburn University zoologist who has studied the ecology of what he calls "pitcher plant bogs" in the Southeast since the early 1970's. Blooming with orchids, lilies and other flowers, the bogs are among the richest plant communities anywhere, with as many as 35 species per square meter. But as many of these soggy sites have been drained and developed, this floral abundance is fading. Compared with the profusion of Bartram's time, only pittance of pitcher plant habitat remains: probably just 3 percent of the carnivorous kingdom that once covered thousands of acres in places along the Gulf Coast. "If something's not done," says Folkerts, "there will be, at the turn of the century, very, very few sites left where one can go and see pitcher plants." In the areas that do remain, overharvesting—including poaching—threatens the future of the carnivores. North Carolina now levies fines of up to \$2,000 for illegal taking of the Venus flytrap.

It is easy to understand the allure of these slightly creepy plants.

“They turn the tables,” explains Leo Song, Jr., manager of the greenhouse complex at California State University, in Fullerton, and coeditor of the quarterly journal of the International Carnivorous Plant Society. “Usually, plants get eaten by insects. And here’s a plant that eats insects.”

Equally intriguing are cases where insects turn the tables yet again. In many bogs, a small moth belonging to the genus Exyra goes about the tricky business of securing food and shelter from the deadly tubes of pitcher plants. The moth’s larva chews a groove around the inside of the pitcher in which it has hatched, causing the upper part of the leaf to wilt and to collapse. The remodeling prevents other insects from entering the tube, thus ending that leaf’s ability to capture prey. A wasp, Isodontia Mexicana, does the same when it lays an egg on alternating layers of grass and paralyzed grasshoppers stuffed into the pitcher leaf.

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If you needed to take notes from this passage for a research paper, you would use the three different note-taking techniques: paraphrase, summary, and direct quote.

Paraphrase

To paraphrase is to restate the thought of a selection more simply and clearly, to translate difficult, involved language or concepts into your own words. If you can paraphrase a passage accurately, it is proof that you thoroughly understand the passage. Your paraphrase is often as long as or even longer than the original statement.

Paraphrase the last sentence in the last paragraph of the excerpt: A wasp (Isodontia mexicana) makes a nest in the pitcher plant leaf. It puts down a layer of paralyzed grasshoppers and grass, and then lays an egg. Then it repeats the layers (Lipske 51).

Summarize

To summarize is to shorten a rather long section of writing into your own words, taking only the key facts and ideas. You do not change the meaning, make an interpretation of your own, leave out parts of the meaning, or insert your own opinion.

Summary of the first paragraph of the excerpt:

Today: just 3% pitcher plant bogs—the habitat of carnivorous plants—left in the Southeast U.S.

Draining for development, overharvesting and poaching threaten remainder by 2000 if continued (Lipske 50).

Direct Quote

To direct quote is to copy the original exactly in wording, spelling, and punctuation. If you must modify the quote in some manner, follow the rules in this handbook. Direct quote **only** those statements that are perfectly phrased (the “last word” on the subject) or that express a point of controversy in an especially effective way. Otherwise paraphrase or summarize the information you have found in research.

”But as many of those soggy sites have been drained and developed, this floral abundance is fading” (Lipske 50).

Academic Honesty

In the process of writing, you may need to quote from the works you are discussing or to use the ideas of another writer to develop your argument. If, for example, you are writing about a novel, you will probably need to quote from the novel or to quote or paraphrase a critic or some other useful source. You must show you have quoted from the novel itself by using quotation marks and following the quotation with its page number in parentheses. (See “Documentation” in this handbook.) In order to use material from another source, you need bibliographic information: author, title, publisher, date, and page number. Be sure to record this information when you are reading. If you do not cite the source in your paper, you are guilty of plagiarism. This is true both for quoted, for summarized, and for paraphrased material or ideas.

Plagiarism is “to deliberately or unintentionally use the ideas and writing of another as your own” ([Academic Honesty at the University of Rochester](#) n. pag.). When you use the ideas of others, you must make clear in your paper that these ideas are not your own. This is true whether you are quoting directly, paraphrasing, or summarizing the views of another writer.

Computer Plagiarism

With the increasing ease and availability of information online, plagiarism has become tempting. This involves downloading information from websites, online databases or other networked sources. Be aware that use of undocumented materials from any of these or other similar sources constitutes plagiarism. This is true for text, ideas, or images. Always be sure to document your sources for any material you have used which you found in another source. See “Documentation” in this handbook for instructions and models for documenting your sources.

The penalty for plagiarism is an automatic zero for the work and may include other serious consequences. (Refer to the section entitled “Academic Honesty” in the Brighton High School [Parent/Student Handbook](#)).

You give credit for ideas or information you have found in your reading by using a parenthetical citation; for specifics on citing material in this manner, see the section of this handbook entitled “Documentation.”

Merely being found on the Internet or communicated through electronic media does not guarantee the validity, seriousness, or credibility of information or ideas. You must exercise considerable caution and judgment in using such material. You must also be diligent about citing such sources when you use them. Do not risk plagiarism.

Writing assignments and oral presentations for foreign language classes

Use of an online translator is permitted for isolated words only. You may use it as you would use a paper dictionary. Translations of blocks of texts are considered a violation of the PMHS academic honesty policy. Work is considered incomplete without use of accents or language-specific punctuation.

Interviewing

An important element of research is interviewing people who have specialized knowledge or experience, which makes their opinions particularly valuable.

Preparation

For example, if you are writing about a student's right to freedom of expression, it would be useful for you to interview the school principal who knows education law, in addition to eliciting opinions from students. A little preparation will make your interview useful and productive.

You may wish to record the interview, but be sure you ask permission to do so when you schedule the interview. If you record, be sure the equipment is ready (batteries intact or AC adapter at hand) and that you have several blank tapes. You should still have paper and pens or pencils even if you record your interview.

- Choose a person who is an expert on the topic you are researching.
- Make an appointment with the person you wish to interview well in advance.
- Be sure that you have done enough research so that you can ask intelligent questions.
- Write a list of questions in advance questions that will require "meaty" answers that you can actually quote directly in your paper.
- Be sure you ask permission to record the interview.

If you are interviewing the principal about a student's right to free you should already have a sense of what that right includes. It would be more useful for your paper to ask the principal about specific experiences he or she may have had regarding this issue than to take up the time asking what the law is.

Conducting the Interview

- Be on time for the interview.
- Take your time when you are writing down the answers.
- Do not hesitate to ask the interviewee to explain or clarify an idea.
- Do not feel that you must follow the exact order of your questions.
- Good interviewers are good listeners.
- Be sure to thank your interviewee for the interview.
- Transcribe your notes as soon as you leave the interview.
- Be sure that you record the interviewee's full name (first and last) and title as well as the date of your interview.