

Christine's example of quotation versus paraphrasing (shown in class Jan 8, 2009)

This example is taken from C.D. Wilson et al., 2009, *Astrophysical Journal*, in press (astro-ph/0812.1718). The quotation is from the conclusions section. I use astronomy-style references in these examples.

1. An example of a direct quotation:

An interesting recent result comes from Wilson et al. (2009), who find that

... using the CO J=3-2 line results in more uniform gas depletion times both within galaxies and from one galaxy to another.”

(Wilson et al. 2009).

2. An example of a good paraphrase of this information:

Wilson et al. (2009) measure more uniform gas depletion times when they use the CO J=3-2 line. This uniformity is found both within and between galaxies.

Note that although many of the words are the same as in the quote (there is only really one way to say “galaxy”, for example) the order of the sentence is re-arranged, some different words are used, and it is broken into two sentences.

3. An example of a questionable paraphrase of this information:

Wilson et al. (2009) find that using the CO J=3-2 line gives more uniform gas depletion times both within galaxies and from galaxy to galaxy.

Note that although “gives” is substituted for “results in” and “galaxy to galaxy” is substituted for “one galaxy to another”, otherwise the structure of the sentence is identical to the quotation. This could be construed as plagiarism, particularly if there are many examples of such sentences in a paper.

Of the three examples, my preferred way to present the information would be the good paraphrase (#2) rather than the direct quotation (#1). Quotes are used only rarely in scientific writing; you should probably have at most one quote in your paper and no quotes at all is perfectly fine.