1. Summarising
While quoting works well for particularly memorable or concise sections of text, you'll often want to convey a larger point in a concise way. In this case you can summarise. Here you repeat the main point, using fewer words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;When humans domesticated fire, they gained control of an obedient and potentially limitless force. Unlike eagles, humans could choose when and where to ignite a flame, and they were able to exploit fire for any number of tasks.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harari (2014, p.13) argues that only humans can control fire, and that it allows them to do many things.</td>
</tr>
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So, we summarise in order to save time and space. You can summarise ideas, paragraphs or even whole books. In order to summarise effectively, you need to deeply understand the argument first before you can simplify it in your version.

2. Paraphrasing
Don't want to quote or summarise? You might decide to paraphrase. Compare the original and a paraphrase of it in the box below:

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<td>&quot;When humans domesticated fire, they gained control of an obedient and potentially limitless force. Unlike eagles, humans could choose when and where to ignite a flame, and they were able to exploit fire for any number of tasks.&quot;</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Paraphrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>According to Harari (2014, p.13), learning how to use fire gave humans enormous power. They could decide the time and place to light a fire, as well as the purpose, unlike other animals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why paraphrase?
So, what's going on here? A paraphrase can be the same length or a little shorter than the original, but it isn't as short as a summary. Why would you use a paraphrase? Perhaps when the section of the original text is only a few sentences long: you don't feel it's suitable for quoting, but it's also too short to summarise.

The language of paraphrase
The other thing to know is that when paraphrasing, you need to modify the language substantially, to avoid plagiarism. For example, the original has the phrases "limitless force" and "when and where to ignite a flame"; these have been changed to "enormous power" and "the time and place to light a fire" in the paraphrase.

Note
It's common to combine all these different strategies within your work. You need to judge when it's best to quote, when to summarise and when to paraphrase.

Exercise 1
Compare these two paragraphs. Paragraph 1) is a quote from Naomi Klein's This Changes Everything (2015). Look at paragraph 2) and decide: is it a summary, quote or paraphrase?

Paragraph 1)
"Renewables are, in fact, much more reliable than power based on extraction, since those energy models require continuous new inputs to avoid a crash, whereas once the initial investment has been made in renewable energy infrastructure, nature provides the raw materials for free." (Klein, 2015, p.395)

Paragraph 2)
Renewable energy sources are more dependable than coal, oil or gas. The latter sources need repeated investment to remain profitable, but once renewable energy systems have been set up, all the necessary inputs come from nature, with no extra cost. (Klein, 2015, p.395)

Answer
Paragraph 2) above is a paraphrase. It expresses the same ideas as the original, using different words. A summary would use even fewer words. For example:

Summary
After initial investment, renewables are cheaper to run than traditional energy sources. (Klein, 2015, p.395)
Exercise 2: Paraphrasing
Let’s look at an original paragraph on page 16 of scientist Stephen Hawkings’ book The Grand Design (2011) – and a paraphrase of it. Can you see why this is NOT a good paraphrase?

Original
"In the history of science, we have discovered a sequence of better and better theories or models, from Plato to the classical theory of Newton to modern quantum theories. It is natural to ask: Will this sequence eventually reach an end point, the ultimate theory of the universe, that will include all forces and predict every observation we can make, or will we continue forever finding better and better theories, but never one that cannot be improved upon?" (Hawkings, 2011, p.16-17)

Paraphrase
According to Hawking (2011, p.p.16-17), in the history of science, we have discovered a sequence of better and better theories or models. He asks if we will ever find a theory that answers all scientific questions, or whether we will only ever make a series of gradual improvements to our theories, but never find one that cannot in any way be bettered or improved upon.

Answer
There are several problems with this paraphrase:

- It doesn’t include the date of publication.
- The first sentence includes a direct quote, but this isn’t acknowledged or indicated.
- The first part of sentence two is fine (until "…scientific questions"), but the second part of this sentence is in fact much longer than the original. Generally, when paraphrasing we also make our version slightly shorter.
- The scientist’s surname should be spelled ‘Hawking’, not ‘Hawkings’.
- The page number is missing.
**Exercise 3: Summarising**

Read this extract from Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *Outliers* (2008, p.30) and choose which summary is the best: A, B or C?

**Original**
"It is those who are successful, in other words, who are most likely to be given the kinds of special opportunities that lead to further success. It's the rich who get the biggest tax breaks. It’s the best students who get the best teaching and most attention. And it’s the biggest nine- and ten-year-olds who get the most coaching and practice. Success is the result of what sociologists like to call "accumulative advantage." (Gladwell, 2008, p.30)

**Summary A**
Rich people usually pay less tax and bigger students receive more sports coaching (Gladwell, 2008, p.30).

**Summary B**
Successful people tend to be given opportunities to become even more successful (Gladwell, 2008, p.30).

**Summary C**
If you are successful, you will probably continue to be successful (Gladwell, 2008, p.30).

**Answer**
A good summary needs to get the main points across concisely. Gladwell’s main point – made in the first sentence of the extract – is that successful people get more opportunities, and therefore continue to be successful.

Summaries B and C make similar points. Summary B is closer to Gladwell's original argument, which focuses on the "opportunities" successful people receive. Summary C takes this a stage further and simplifies it even more (success = success). Which is better? It depends. Are you just trying to summarise the words on the page, or to simplify the whole idea? Both options have their advantages.

Summary A, on the other hand, isn’t really a summary. It mentions two out of the three examples Gladwell gives, but fails to include his main point, which is that success leads to more success.
Review
Well done – you’ve almost reached the end of these materials. Before you leave, take a moment to look back at some of the main points.

- You may choose to quote particularly interesting or memorable sections directly
- You may choose to summarise longer arguments or theories
- You may also choose to paraphrase short sections which you do not wish to quote
- Whichever method you use, be sure to reference your source – this usually means giving the writer’s name, year of publication and page number.

More
Remember to check our Academic Writing webpages for information and activities to practise:

- Academic vocabulary
- Understanding assignment questions
- Writing effective paragraphs
- Essay organisation
- Writing a list of references
- And more!

You can find these materials at
http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/gothedistance/academicwriting