Quoting, paraphrasing and summarising

What is the difference between quoting, paraphrasing and summarising?
When you create an academic text such as an essay, report or review, it is very likely that you will want to refer to the writing produced by other people on the same topic. This is because:

- You want to demonstrate to your tutor that you have read the work done by experts in your discipline area;
- References to other material establishes a solid foundation for your own writing, and is expected in academic texts;
- The text expresses exactly what you want to write, or supports your own point of view;
- You want to criticize or critique the text of another person;
- You want to provide an alternative perspective to your own.

However, if you use the work of others in your own writing you must always acknowledge that the extract is not original but has been copied. This rule applies whether you quote, paraphrase or summarise. You can acknowledge your source by writing it in brackets after the quote, paraphrase or summary (if it is not included beforehand), and including a more detailed reference at the end of your essay.

If you quote, you use the original author’s words exactly as they appear in the original text. If you paraphrase, you take the ideas of the original author, but change the wording so that it fits with your style. If you summarise, you take only the main points from the original text and write them in your own words, much more briefly than the original author. In all cases, you need to acknowledge the original text with a reference.

Some examples of how quotations, paraphrasing or summaries may appear:
- Quoting: It has been argued that the Leitmann incident “never took place” (Kritwitz, 1993:76).
- Summarising: Kritwitz has argued, in his 1993 paper On Leitmann and Blame, that the incident did, in fact, not occur.
- Paraphrase: In 1993 Kritwitz presented an argument that the Leitmann incident had not occurred and was actually the product of a government campaign of disinformation (p76-7).

Activity 1: Which is which? Decide whether the following rules apply to quoting, paraphrasing or summarising:

1. Use quotation marks
2. Use synonyms instead of the original words
3. Make sure that you acknowledge the original author
4. Write the exact words of the original author
5. Take only the most important ideas from the original text and put them in your own words
Activity 2: Quoting, paraphrasing and summarising. Read the text below. After you have read the text, have a look at the three extracts in the table which follows, and decide which one is an example of a quotation, which one is a summary and which one is a paraphrase.

Alexander Graham Bell is the man credited with inventing the telephone. He was born in Scotland in 1847, but later moved to Canada, where he taught deaf people. His invention was based on his discovery that sound waves could travel through wire; once electricity was added to his listening contraption it was possible to extend the distances that the sound waves could be sent. He registered his invention in 1876, thereby ensuring his position in history as the man who invented the telephone.

1. He was born in Scotland in 1847, but later moved to Canada.

2. Alexander Graham Bell, who was born in Scotland in 1847 but later moved to Canada, invented the telephone after combining electricity with his discovery that sound waves can travel through wire. His invention was registered in 1876.

3. He invented the telephone by making an appliance that permitted sound waves to travel through wire via an electric current.