

Paraphrasing II - How to do it

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Paraphrasing is an important skill that you need to learn and we want to help you. Welcome to Paraphrasing 2-How to do it. In this segment, we will look at what you need to paraphrase appropriately, some methods you can use to paraphrase effectively.

Slide 2 Overview

In this segment, we will look at what you need to paraphrase appropriately, some methods you can use to paraphrase effectively, and the main principles of paraphrasing correctly.

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There are some things you need even before you begin to actually write the paraphrase. We mistakenly think that paraphrasing is just about our ability to write. Good paraphrasing, in fact, begins with reading--and reading carefully. So no quick surface reading is allowed if you intend to paraphrase the material you have read. And why do we have to read carefully?

We read carefully so that we understand fully what we have read. We cannot only partially understand something we intend to paraphrase. (Because it tests both your reading and writing skills, there is nothing like trying to paraphrase a passage to reveal the level of your understanding.)

We also need to know something about the language -- the words we are reading and the words we will write. What words in the original can I use? Or must I use? This requires differentiating between unique words and common words—the words of a discipline and words of every day speech. In some disciplines, specific specialized words must be used—there are no alternatives or synonyms. Trying to find other words for these will be time consuming and just get you in trouble. Other uncommon words that have few synonyms can also be used with obsessing over them. Feel free to also use common words that have few synonyms or if they do have synonyms, they don't quite fit the context in which you are writing. One final comment about language/words: Avoid using words in your paraphrase that are used in a particular or peculiar or special way by the author—even if they appear to be common words. They can be common words use in an uncommon way. If you use them in the same way, you should quote those words then.

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Now that we know what we need to paraphrase, how do we go about it? There are a number of methods to paraphrase the words of others including placing the information in a new order, putting complex ideas into smaller units of meaning, using concrete and direct language instead of specialized words or jargon, changing and varying sentence patterns, and using synonyms. When using any of these methods you want to take care to not change the content or the intent of the original passage. For example, if I were paraphrasing a process I would not put the information in a new order as this would change the intent of the passage.

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I want to focus on the last two methods as they are the core of good paraphrasing.

The key principle of paraphrasing is this: Whatever you do when you paraphrase, all proper paraphrasing is not just substituting phrases or words arbitrarily. You must change some of the words as well as the word and phrase order or what we call syntax or sentence structure.

Notice, I said some of the words. I have not provided you with a magical number, a magical percentage, that will make your paraphrase correct.

You must determine the words you change and how many you change according to the content, the discipline you are writing in, and the nature of the words you are using within that discipline. To simply change a few words or even 50% of the words but leave the sentence structure the same could result in accusations of plagiarism.

You must also change some of the sentence structure –or the word and phrase order. Again, note I have said some and not told you how much or what to change. This is not a mathematical equation. You must use your understanding of the text as well as your intent in paraphrasing it and what you hope to communicate to your audience to determine both the words and sentence structure you change. (The Paraphrasing III module will give you examples of acceptable and unacceptable changes in words and structure.)

Finally, you must reference the original in some way. If you change some of the words and some of the sentence structure and do not reference the original, you could be accused of plagiarizing. The reference could be the author's name in parentheses after the paraphrase or it could be a tag such as According to Dr. Smith

You must follow all 3 of these principles in order to paraphrase correctly.

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Let's go over a checklist as a review (that is helpful in considering) as we begin to paraphrase.

Have you fully understood the passage you will paraphrase? You can't make a correct paraphrase unless you understand the passage fully.

Have you changed some of the words? Remember, we don't need to change all the words and there is no mathematical special number for how many to change. But we do need to change some of the words. We may not in fact want to change the key words; they are key words for a reason. We don't want to change intent or focus of the passage

Have the changed words maintained the same meaning in the context? Make sure you choose words that are appropriate to the context, appropriate to what you are saying. Check with a thesaurus check with your teacher. Have you changed the sentence structure? Again, we don't need to change everything in the Sentence Structure but some part, some aspect of the SS needs to be changed. Have you referenced the original author?--either as signal phrase within your own sentence or as a reference somewhere in your sentence. Have you used a signal phrase or tag? This is optional but I would recommend you using signal phrases/tag at this point in your writing.

Slide 7: This is the end of Paraphrasing II. For explanation and examples of what makes for unacceptable and therefore plagiarised paraphrasing and acceptable paraphrasing and what make some paraphrasing better than other paraphrasing see and listen to Paraphrasing Module 3.