How to Paraphrase
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Paraphrasing is putting someone else’s idea entirely in your own words.

You are borrowing the idea but not the words of another.

Paraphrasing is when you borrow someone’s idea, and when using that idea in your paper, you put it entirely in your own words. You are borrowing an idea, not words.
Paraphrasing is a way to understand a text. It’s not only a writing strategy but a reading and thinking strategy. It takes critical reading and thinking to unpack a source’s thoughts, language, or specialized terminology and put it into your own words. Because of this, paraphrasing is an excellent way to demonstrate your comprehension of newly learned concepts hence why you will be assigned research papers in so many of your college courses—paraphrasing allows you to show that you understand the ideas of the experts in your field so that you may then analyze and evaluate them.

When the authors of *The Thinker’s Guide to How to Write a Paragraph*, Paul and Elder (2003), said, “When one can say what great minds have thought, one can think what great minds have said,” they were talking about paraphrasing as a way to acquire the wisdom of the thinkers that came before us.

Paraphrasing is also one of three practical ways to support your original ideas in a paper. The other two ways to support your points are by quoting and summarizing, and we touch more on those shortly. Paraphrasing allows you to borrow the idea of another writer in order to illustrate your point or help explain it, and when you use the ideas of experts in your writing, you are also using their authority and credibility, which then makes your points more authoritative and credible (that is, if you’ve used credible sources).
Another reason to use paraphrasing specifically over quoting is to seamlessly integrate research-based information in your writing. Unlike quoting where you interject another voice into your writing, paraphrasing is the strategy you use when you want to present someone else’s ideas using your own voice—your own wording and style of writing. This is especially important when your sources are experts in their field writing for other experts, and they are using specialized terminology or such complex language like that found in the sciences, legal studies, and information technology that your intended readers wouldn’t understand it out of context or if you didn’t break it down into simpler terms.
Like paraphrasing, quoting is another way to support your points with authority, evidence, and examples; however, too much quoting can come off as summarizing because you haven’t unpacked the ideas or synthesized them with your points in your own words. Too much quoting can also overshadow your ideas since by quoting, you are letting your source speak for you. Quotes also require more work on the part of the reader to understand what’s being said, which will slow reading down.
It’s best to paraphrase your sources unless however you are presenting a dialogue, critiquing someone’s exact words, or if you cannot paraphrase accurately or adequately enough to avoid plagiarizing or changing the meaning of the original.
Summarizing is another option for supporting and adding depth to your points. When summarizing too, you are putting the source’s ideas in your own words; however, unlike paraphrasing, which involves unpacking one excerpt of text—a sentence maybe two, when summarizing you are condensing and simplifying a long text or complex text to present a recap or synopsis of the main points. While paraphrases tend to be longer than the original, summaries are shorter, and where paraphrases show your understanding of an idea, a summary only shows that you’ve read something and can say what it’s about, not necessarily that you understand it.
How to Paraphrase

1. Read original several times.
2. Use context clues.
3. Look up words you don’t know.
4. Without looking at the original, write the idea in your own words.
5. Check for consistent meaning.

The first step in paraphrasing is to read the original several times, not only the passage you want to paraphrase but the whole article, chapter, and page, so you are clear about the context of the statement. Your readers are only going to hear an idea from one part, so in your paraphrase, you will want to make sure that you aren’t using someone’s idea out of context, which would change the meaning. Also, be sure to look up any words you do not know, so you understand their definitions. Then, without looking at the original, write the idea in your own words. One strategy is to imagine telling the idea to a classmate or friend so that you choose the words best suited for your intended reader. You’ll then want to check your paraphrase against the original to ensure the meanings of both are consistent. Asking a peer or a tutor to read the original and then your paraphrase can also help you be sure you are conveying the same idea but in your own words.
How to Paraphrase

- Using technical terms and statistics from the original is okay.
- Avoid using the same words as the original or substituting with synonyms.
- Expect the paraphrase to be longer.

It is okay to use technical terms, names, and numbers from the original in your paraphrase, but you’ll otherwise want to avoid using any of the same words. Also, substituting words from the original with synonyms is not adequate because putting something in your own words means using your own sentence structure too. You want to write it in your own style taking your intended readers into consideration. Remember that your source’s intended readers generally aren’t your same readers, and your source’s purpose for writing will also be different than yours.
Let's paraphrase this famous quote attributed to Albert Einstein. He said, “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.” What did he mean? Take a minute and write your understanding of the passage in your own words in the chat.
To me, understanding something in order to be able to explain it is similar to the act of paraphrasing, so here’s mine: According to Albert Einstein, a true measure of learning something is being able to paraphrase the idea in basic terms.
Plagiarizing the quote would be writing it with some different words but still using many of the same words or swapping the words from the original with synonyms while still keeping the original author’s basic sentence structure. In the plagiarized example, “you aren’t able to explain” and “you can’t explain” are too similar, and “you haven’t fully comprehended” and “you don’t understand it well enough” are also too similar, so even when you’ve identified the author, you can still unintentionally plagiarize if you haven’t put the passage entirely in your own wording and phrasing.

By the way, I selected this quote to illustrate how paraphrasing is principally about unpacking an idea and putting it in your own words. This particular quote is from an online “quotes” page, and as I was verifying it, I found it on many other pages of “famous quotes,” so I’m only attributing it to Einstein and not any particular person or organization that compiled the webpage of famous quotes. I’m therefore attributing the quote to Einstein. On my references list, I would provide a citation where a reader could access the webpage where I got it. We’ll look at citation examples in a bit.
This quote is from a YouTube video by Jay Walker on “The World’s English.” He was talking about nonnative speakers of English when he said, “Your native language is your life, but with English you can become part of a wider conversation” (Walker, 2009).

To paraphrase this, the first step would be to determine what he means by “your life” and “a wider conversation” in particular. One of the steps of paraphrasing is rereading or in this case, re-watching the video, paying attention to context clues to understand what he means. Since you haven’t seen the whole video, I’ll provide the sample paraphrase.
By watching the full video several times, I was able to decipher his meaning as this: “Learning English as a second language doesn’t undermine one’s first language; it helps one contribute more ideas on important world matters (Walker, 2009).
It would be plagiarism if I used too many of his words or even just his same sentence structure, or if I didn’t attribute the idea to Walker using an in-text citation. Notice by just using synonyms and paraphrasing “you can become part of a wider conversation” by saying “allows you to participate in more conversations,” changing “can become part” to “participate” and “wider” to “more,” I actually change his meaning showing that I haven’t fully understood the original.
Citing a Paraphrase

Option 1: Mention the author’s last name in the text followed by the publication year in parentheses:

According to Walker (2009), learning English as a second language doesn’t undermine one’s first language; it helps one to contribute more ideas on important world matters.


All paraphrases require an in-text citation, and there are two ways to provide that information in the body of your essay. Option 1 is to use the author’s last name in the sentence, usually in a signal phrase that leads into the paraphrase. Following the author’s last name, you include the publication year in parentheses as shown in the example: According to Walker (2009), … You could also say, Walker (2009) said, … or Walker (2009) stated, ….

The full citation, which would be given on a references list at the end of the paper, includes the author’s name, the publication year, the title and format of the work and the publishing or retrieval information. For a video file from YouTube, you write “available from” and then provide the URL.
Citing a Paraphrase

Option 2: Provide the author’s last name followed by a comma and the publication year in parentheses:

Learning English as a second language doesn’t undermine one’s first language; it helps one to contribute more ideas on important world matters (*Walker, 2009*).


Option 2 is to provide the author’s last name followed by a comma and the publication year in parentheses at the end of the paraphrase as shown in the example: (*Walker, 2009*).

Every source cited in an in-text citation has a corresponding Reference page citation (unless it’s the paraphrase of a famous person’s quote as we discussed or if it’s a paraphrase from a personal communication like an interview). The full citation enables a reader to locate the source and verify it. The Writing Center also gives workshops on APA citation format, which I highly recommend for more details on reference citations.
Well done! We’ve covered all the basics. You now know how to paraphrase and it’s now a matter of practicing. For some practice exercises please click the link: http://khe2.adobeconnect.com/p27h2w3mkih/. For even more help, visit the Writing Center!
For more writing support, connect with the KUWC’s newly redesigned webpage. You can actually Google and find this page. This is also a great way for you to stay connected to the KUWC through our blog and Twitter. Many of our resources are here as well.
Come visit us. We can be found under the My Studies tab, then under Academic Support Center.
Under the heading Manage Your Studies and Time, click the Research, Citation, and Plagiarism link. Other Writing Center services include Connect with a Tutor, Submit a Paper or Question, Webinars, and more. Notice, you can access the Kaplan Guide to Successful Writing on the left hand side in both print and audio form.
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