

PARAPHRASING (PODCAST 12 TRANSCRIPT)

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Greetings everyone. This is Kurtis Clements with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to talk about paraphrasing.

Paraphrasing, as I am sure you know, is something you will have to do whenever you are engaged in research and need to integrate ideas and information from others into a work of your own. Most people think that paraphrasing is a matter of swapping out a few words in someone else's sentence with new words, a process made easy by use of a handy-dandy thesaurus, but this is not really paraphrasing. Changing a few words in someone else's sentence is just that-changing a few words in someone else's sentence. At best, such an effort is poor paraphrasing and at worst plagiarism.

Paraphrasing, when done well, is when someone else's ideas are put into your own words and structure. Paraphrased content contains the original's idea, but that's it. Your job when paraphrasing it is to not only change all of the key words, but you also have to change the sentence structures used to express the ideas. And you don't want to take bits and pieces from a couple of sentences and glue them together into a new sentence that you call your own. That's not an effective way to paraphrase. So how do you paraphrase effectively? I am going to answer this question, but let me backtrack just a bit first.

When you are engaged in research and consulting sources, you are going to need to take notes and when doing so, you have four options: record personal thoughts, quote verbatim, summarize, or paraphrase. Although this podcast is going to focus on paraphrasing, but let me make a distinction between paraphrasing and summarizing. When you summarize, you record the essence of what the source says, using your own words and structure. A summary is the basic idea of the content and is significantly compressed compared to the original. Often an entire article or even book is summarized to a few sentences. A summary shrinks content to the essential idea and is much, much shorter compared to the original.

When you paraphrase, you transform someone else's content into your own words and using your own sentence structures, but you still maintain the integrity of the original in terms of the idea expressed. A paraphrase will be, give or take a little, about the same length as the original, but you must exercise caution when you paraphrase because you do not want your paraphrase to be too close to the original material. You also need to keep in mind that whenever you borrow material from someone else, whether you summarize or paraphrase that material, you need to give credit where credit is due by attributing the information to the source and/or using an in-text citation.

Paraphrasing is a skill and learning a skill takes time and practice, but once you practice enough, the process will get easier.

So, in a nutshell, when you paraphrase, you have to accomplish the following each and every time: (1)



Put the material in your own words; (2) express the idea with your own sentence structure; and (3) cite where the content originated.

Paraphrasing can be done in one of two ways--the good way or the bad way. Let's start with the bad way. If you are inclined to more or less swap out a few words, what you end up with is a sentence that likely has many of the original words expressed in a structure that does not belong to you. This would not be a good paraphrase; it would be bad paraphrase and may even hedge toward plagiarism.

Listen to this sentence from John Gardner's *The Art of Fiction*: What the beginning writer ordinarily wants is a set of rules on what to do and what not to do in writing fiction.

Listen to this paraphrase: The beginning writer usually wants a set of rules to follow when writing fiction.

What do you think of this paraphrase?

Listen once again...

Original: What the beginning writer ordinarily wants is a set of rules on what to do and what not to do in writing fiction.

Paraphrase: The beginning writer usually wants a set of rules to follow when writing fiction.

The paraphrase is not good at all. What the writer has basically done is cut out a few words and changed a couple of others. Instead of saying "What the beginning writer ordinarily wants," the paraphrase leaves off the "What" at the start of the sentence and swaps out the word "ordinarily" for "usually"; the other changes are to make the grammar of the statement work with the changes.

There's not much difference between "What the beginning writer ordinarily wants" and "The beginning writer usually wants." Right? Right. The paraphrase is not good and some instructors might flag it as plagiarism even if a citation is included.

One of the things about doing a good paraphrase is that you have to be willing to do what I call the leg work. You have to be willing to take the time to work on the wording and the structure of the sentence when paraphrasing. You have to take a little extra time and think about what a sentence is saying and how you could express the same idea using your own language and style.

Here's how to paraphrase the Gardner example effectively:

The original reads: What the beginning writer ordinarily wants is a set of rules on what to do and what not to do in writing fiction.

Effective paraphrase: Although there are no rules when it comes to writing fiction, new writers still crave a set of basic guidelines to follow.

Is this paraphrase substantively different from the original? Is the language used different from the original? Is the structure of the sentence different from the original? In all cases, the answer is yes. The wording is unique compared to the original and the structure of the sentence—the way the idea is expressed—does not mirror the original. In addition, the idea expressed in the paraphrase is exactly



the same as in the original.

Learning to paraphrase is a skill that will serve you well in your academic careers. While doing a good job paraphrasing takes practice, with a little effort on your part—a little leg work as I like to say—you'll be paraphrasing other people's ideas effectively.

Thanks for listening everyone. Happy writing.

