

HOW TO PARAPHRASE

It can be daunting to reword material, especially if it's already written so eloquently. Of course, you can directly quote a sentence or a few sentences, but only on occasion: you'll have to paraphrase the majority of the material you use.

Paraphrasing basically means writing in your own words. It should reflect your style of writing. Paraphrasing is not, therefore, simply changing a few words here or there. You need to use your own vocabulary and structure *without losing the original meaning*.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you can't use *any* of the words used in the original text. With certain words, known as "common vocabulary", this is not possible, and it's acceptable to reuse these words. This includes technical terms and phrases.

Paraphrasing is also not summarizing. You might end up shortening the length of the original, but this is not the main purpose. You just want to repeat the meaning of the text in your own words.

Writing a passage in your own words also tests your understanding of what you've read. This is important, especially if you're going to have to defend your work at a later date.

■ Tips on effective paraphrasing

Here's a little overall guidance on how to paraphrase:

- ▶ Read the material carefully and make sure you understand it.
- ▶ Note what the main points and concepts are.
- ▶ Keeping in mind these main points and concepts, write the material in your own words.
- ▶ Read the original text again to make sure you've retained its meaning.
- ▶ Cite the source: even if you didn't directly quote from the source, you *must* cite it.

■ How notes can help with paraphrasing

You can actually help yourself by the notes you take while reading. If you're someone who likes to highlight or underline important parts of the text, also write notes in the margins, summarizing the parts you've marked out. If you're reading from a website or a book, make sure you don't simply copy down extracts word for word, or copy and paste: get into the habit of taking simple yet meaningful notes, summarizing what you've read.

For more assistance on note-taking, check out "**Getting started: understanding the question and note-taking**" in this series.

■ A few additional tips

If you're stuck on how to proceed, here are a few quick and dirty tips:

- ▶ **Change the vocabulary by looking up synonyms:** for instance, instead of "power" use "control", or instead of "farming" use "agriculture" (but, if you use a word you haven't heard of before, be careful that the synonym means what you think it does by checking it in the dictionary first).
- ▶ **Change the word order:** for instance, instead of "a rising economy" write "the economy was rising".
- ▶ **Change the sentence structure:** combine smaller sentences, or break up a longer sentence.
- ▶ **Change the voice from passive to active and vice versa** (check out "Active versus passive voice" in this series for more information).
- ▶ **Quote unique phrases:** you don't need to paraphrase *everything* if you feel a phrase or even a sentence or two are worth retaining exactly as they are.

■ Paraphrasing check list

To make sure that your paraphrasing is sufficient, here's a short check list of points to consider:

- ▶ **Did you only change a few words?** Using a few synonyms or adding/subtracting a word here and there does not make the text yours (and can even be regarded as plagiarism).
- ▶ **Did you use any word for word sentences or phrases?** If so, make sure you indicated this by using quotation marks, or indenting as a block quote if 40 words or over (see "How to quote" in this series for more guidance on this issue).
- ▶ **Is the meaning still the same?** When you cite a source, you need to retain the meaning for academic honesty.

For more information on paraphrasing and how to avoid plagiarism, have a look at "How to avoid plagiarism" in this series.