

Using Sources Tutorial:

**Tutorial #23:
Paraphrasing**

Writing Center

English 800 Center

All notes and exercises should be done on separate sheets of paper, which you will bring to your conference with an instructor in the center.

As you work through the tutorial, make sure to see an instructional aide at the front desk in the Writing Center or English 800 Center if you have any questions or difficulties.

Integrating Sources into Your Own Writing: Paraphrasing

Most college courses require students to paraphrase and use quotations from readings. Writers use these techniques when writing a paper to develop, analyze, and interpret the points they are making in their essays. Keep in mind that the purpose of using these techniques is to *support* your ideas and to *show* that you have thought in depth about an issue. When using sources, such as books, articles, or essays, you must know how to do the following:

- summarize an author's writing (Tutorial 21, Summarizing)
- quote from the author's writing (Tutorial 22, Using Quotations)
- paraphrase from the author's writing (*this tutorial*)

What is Paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is restating information from a source in your own words.

Differences between a Summary and a Paraphrase

Like a summary, a paraphrase does *not* include your opinion or personal reaction. However, there is an important difference between a summary and a paraphrase. A summary is shorter and less detailed than the original text while a paraphrase is roughly the same length and provides the same level of detail as the original text.

When to Paraphrase

Just as when you use quotations and summaries, it takes practice to know when to effectively paraphrase. You should save quotations for the most meaningful, effectively worded passages of the original text—for sentences that the author has expressed in an especially articulate, powerful way. Paraphrases, on the other hand, are ideal for important insights or facts that you can translate into your own words.

A paraphrase has the following advantages:

- A paraphrase helps you to avoid quoting too much.
- A paraphrase helps your reader to grasp the full meaning of a complex, original text,
- A paraphrase helps you improve your own understanding of the text.

Paraphrases and Plagiarism

While a paraphrase should closely reflect the presentation of ideas in the original text, it should *not* use the same words as the original. That is, you must use your own words and sentence structure when writing paraphrases. If you use too many of the author's words, you are guilty of plagiarism, that is, **presenting the author's words and ideas as your own**. If a student's essay contains plagiarism, there are dire consequences; the professor will almost always fail the essay.

Let's take a look at an example of plagiarism.

Here is the **original text written by author Raymond Nickerson**:

In order to communicate effectively with other people, one must have a reasonably accurate idea of what they do and do not know that is pertinent to the communication. Treating people as though they have knowledge that they do not have can result in miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment. On the other hand, a fundamental rule of conversation, at least according to a Gricean view, is that one generally does not convey to others information that one can assume they already have.

--excerpt from Raymond S. Nickerson's "How We Know-and Sometimes Misjudge-What Others Know: Imputing One's Own Knowledge to Others." *Psychological Bulletin* 125.6 (1999): 737.

Here is a **plagiarized** version of the original text:

For effective communication, it is necessary to have a fairly accurate idea of what our listeners know or do not know that is pertinent to the communication. If we assume that people know something they do not, then miscommunication and perhaps embarrassment may result. However, a guideline for conversations is that we shouldn't explain information to others that they already possess (737).

Why Is It Plagiarism?

The student who wrote this paraphrase has used too many of Nickerson's original words and phrases, such as "effective communication," "accurate idea," "know or do not know," "pertinent," "miscommunication," and "embarrassment." In the paraphrase, none of these words or phrases have quotation marks to show that they are not the student's own words. In other words, the student is presenting Nickerson's words as her own.

Also, note that the paraphrase does not indicate Nickerson is the author of the paraphrased text. A page number at the end of a paragraph is **not** sufficient to indicate that this is a paraphrase of Nickerson's sentences.

Here is an **acceptable** paraphrase of the original text:

Nickerson suggests that effective communication depends on a generally accurate knowledge of what the audience knows. If a speaker assumes too much knowledge about the subject, the audience will either misunderstand or be bewildered; however, assuming too little knowledge among those in the audience may cause them to feel patronized (737).

Why Is This Paraphrase Acceptable?

This paraphrase is acceptable because the student puts Nickerson’s idea about what determines effective communication into her own words. She changes “generally accurate knowledge” into “reasonably accurate idea.” In the second sentence, she rewords Nickerson’s ideas about miscommunication and embarrassment, using the words “misunderstand,” “bewildered,” and “patronized.”

By introducing the paraphrase with “Nickerson suggests,” the student also makes it clear from the beginning that she is paraphrasing Nickerson’s ideas. If available, always begin a paraphrase with the author’s name, even if it is taken from a website.

Please note that you must always document a paraphrase. If you are using a print source, include the page number in parentheses immediately after the paraphrase, as shown in the acceptable paraphrase above. Use the number only—*no* “page” or “p.” Also, omit the period at the end of the paraphrase, and add a period at the end of the closed parenthesis.

This is an example of a successful paraphrase because the student understands Nickerson’s ideas and is able to put them into her own words while being careful to let

Principle I: To paraphrase:

1. Read the original very carefully. After reading it, set the original aside and change the author’s sentence into your own words.
2. Make it clear from the beginning of the paraphrase exactly whose ideas you are paraphrasing. Along with the author’s last name, use words like *according to*, *writes*, *suggests*, *believes*.
3. Compare your version with the original text to make sure that you accurately express all the original information.
4. Be sure to use quotation marks if you have used any of the author’s phrases from the original text.
5. Be sure to document the paraphrase. That is, include the page number in parentheses after the paraphrase in your essay. Do not use a period at the end of the paraphrase. Instead, add the period after the closed parenthesis.

A Final Note about Plagiarism

Always provide credit to all sources, whether you are summarizing their ideas, paraphrasing them, or directly quoting them. The easy availability of texts online today makes it even more critical to carefully document all sources in your papers. Avoid cutting and pasting information from a website because this easy method of consolidating one’s research can too easily lead to a serious offense—**plagiarism--using someone else’s ideas as your own, either purposely or accidentally**. To avoid plagiarism, use your own words and sentence structure, make it clear from the beginning of the paraphrase exactly whose ideas you are paraphrasing, and document your paraphrase with a parenthetical reference.

Exercise 1

Instructions: Using Principle I, write your own paraphrases of the following sentences, taken directly from different texts.

1. Dolores Hayden's words:

As the nineteenth-century sexual double standard is preserved by urban advertising, many twenty-first-century urban men behave as if good women are at home while bad ones adorn the billboards and travel on their own in urban space. (from "Advertisements, Pornography, and Public Space," page 79)

2. Brent Staples' words:

I began to take precautions to make myself less threatening. I give a wide berth to nervous people on subway platforms during the wee hours, particularly when I have exchanged business clothes for jeans. (from "Just Walk On By," page 162)

3. Elena Choy

I am saying with much embarrassment, that a professor should ask himself a hard question: If students in my courses are using laptops for purposes unrelated to the course, what am I doing wrong? (from "Laptops in the Classroom, No Problem," page 37)

Exercise 2

Instructions:

1. Review an essay that you have completed that includes paraphrases. Comparing your paraphrases to the examples in this tutorial will also help you realize if you are paraphrasing correctly. In your paraphrases, be sure that you put quotation marks around any words from the original passage.
2. Look back at the principles and exercises in this tutorial and make notes on a separate sheet of paper. You will bring these notes and the essay to your conference.
3. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor in the Writing Center (18-104) or English 800 Center (18-102). To make this appointment, stop by the Centers or call (650) 574-6436. During this appointment, the professor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to these exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.

Reminder:

For this appointment, bring

- any notes about the tutorial that you have taken
- your completed tutorial exercises
- and the essay