Aim of this factsheet

To help you to understand what paraphrasing is, and how to do it.

What is paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is the technique of summarising or discussing the work of other authors. This is often described as ‘putting it in your own words’; however, you must represent the idea or theory accurately and paraphrased work must still be referenced appropriately (with in-text citation or footnote, depending on the referencing system used on your course).

Why you should paraphrase

Used sparingly, direct quotes can be very effective when used to underpin, develop or add impact to a point that you are discussing in your work. However, an over-reliance on quoted material means you are not demonstrating that you have really understood it, and can often limit your ability to properly discuss evidence in relation to the question and the other literature on the subject. By contrast, paraphrasing (or summarising) allows you to do the following:

- Demonstrate a higher level of understanding of key concepts, as in order to paraphrase effectively you must digest and fully understand the original source.
- Discuss links and connections between the cited work and the question you are answering (or the point that you are making).
- Enable the reader to grasp broad ideas or arguments without reading the source text.
- Better discuss theories and sources, making you more able to demonstrate that you have adopted a critical approach to your reading in relation to the question. Relying heavily on quotes demonstrates only that you can identify evidence and include it in your piece of work in its original form.

How to do it (and how not to do it)

**Good Practice**

- Keeps the paraphrase as simple as possible
- Expresses the points concisely
- Expresses the main idea in your own words
- Replaces unusual words (although some technical terms may obviously need to be retained in order for your work to be accurate).
### Incorrect Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorrect Practice</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses the same sentence structure as the original source: for example, only a few words are changed.</td>
<td>You must <em>either</em> quote word-for-word and indicate that this is a quote, or paraphrase by properly digesting and rephrasing sources. You should not try to only slightly adapt the original source and then pass this off as your own summary or paraphrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copies useful pieces of the original text, and fills in ‘own words’ around these.</td>
<td>As above, you must not use bits of the original sentence(s) without attributing these appropriately: risk of plagiarism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change each word to a similar one as you go along a sentence, so <em>technically</em> it is all changed...</td>
<td>It is unlikely that your final sentence will actually make sense or faithfully reflect the original meaning of the source material, both of which are vital to academic writing. It will also be obvious that this is what you have done, and it does not demonstrate understanding or application of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REMEMBER:** paraphrased work still needs the in-text citation. You need to say where the idea or information is from, even when you have put it into your own words.

---

**Assistive technology tools**

These can help you to improve your work and further develop your academic skills. When paraphrasing, you may consider using:

- Text-to-speech software – reads text documents aloud and you are then more likely to hear errors. For example, you may wish to try out the inbuilt tools in Microsoft Word (try ‘Read Aloud’ or ‘Speak’ depending on the version).
- For more information on assistive technologies go to our [guidance page](#).
Examples (Extracts from Purdue University, 2018; referencing amended to reflect Harvard style)

The original passage:

“Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final [research] paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes” (Lester, 1976 p.46-47).

A plagiarised version:

Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes.

This paraphrase fails for two reasons:

1. By having no citation, the paraphrase misleads readers into believing that the ideas, facts and sense of the passage are a result of the author’s own research or knowledge.

2. The language of the paraphrase is too similar to the original. Even if the author had provided a citation, this would be considered plagiarism.

A legitimate paraphrase:

In research papers students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester, 1976).

This paraphrase cites the original and rephrases its words to create an original construction.

An acceptable summary:

According to Lester (1976) students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper.

Reference


For an appointment or further advice:

Click: Academic Skills Online Resources
Call: 01785 353500
Email: academicskills@staffs.ac.uk
Visit: Skills Space, Thompson Library, Stoke / Blackheath Lane, Stafford / Shrewsbury Hospital

Please note that any information provided by the team is advisory only. No liability will be attached to the University its employees or agents for any loss or detriment suffered by a student relying on the advice given.