



“Write it in your own words” - a guide to paraphrasing and summarizing original texts

If your intent when paraphrasing or summarizing original texts is simply to avoid plagiarizing, you are missing the point. In this module, you will learn how to re-word texts to incorporate another author’s ideas into your work.

Writing that includes a variation of another author’s text, presented in your own work and using “your own words” is known as **paraphrasing**. But it is not as simple as using the thesaurus feature of your word processor to replace a few key words of the original text and provide a citation; this would be considered an act of plagiarism. And even if you completely rephrase the text, you must still cite the source of the information. Failing to do so would also be considered plagiarism.

Paraphrasing is used mostly with short (a few sentences or a paragraph) sections of text when trying to integrate material from another source into your assignments to **offer support or evidence for your own ideas**. When paraphrasing, it is essential that the entire original meaning of the text remains intact. Never “cherry pick” information to support your ideas if doing so changes or misrepresents the original message/intent in any way.

So how do you effectively paraphrase such that the original text is sufficiently different from your version while ensuring that you recapture the original meaning? The key lies in understanding why you are paraphrasing in the first place. If your intent is simply to avoid plagiarizing, you are missing the point. Paraphrasing is in fact much more about demonstrating understanding. It is an excellent active learning strategy that involves focusing on reading for understanding instead of concentrating solely on how you can change the words or rearrange the sentences in a paragraph to say the same thing. Paraphrasing class notes while you are studying, for example, helps you gain a deeper understanding of concepts, more so than memorizing the same text.

The following two part list of steps will help guide you to becoming better at paraphrasing.

First,

1. Read the text that you want to paraphrase as many times as needed until you fully understand the meaning.
2. Next, try speaking to yourself (silently or aloud – whichever works!) the meaning of the text you want to paraphrase without looking at the original. Then jot it down in note form.

Once you can do this, continue below:

3. To improve clarity, replace unfamiliar words with suitable synonyms as long as this does not change the overall meaning.
4. Try changing the structure of the original sentences by either inverting the order of sentence parts or breaking them into shorter sentences.
5. Rewrite the text, taking care to explain and re-word any abstract concepts.
6. Add the citation using the required style (i.e. APA, MLA, IEEE).
7. Revise for spelling, grammar and compare to the original text.

To **summarize a text**, the steps listed above remain the same. In contrast to paraphrasing, the purpose of summarizing is to provide a broad level overview of a text by condensing it down to the most important ideas. The length of your summary will depend largely on the length of the original text. For example, if the text you are summarizing is a page long, your summary may be a paragraph; if the original text is a paragraph, your summary may be only a sentence or two. In contrast, a paraphrased text should be approximately the same length as the original text.

Direct quotations of an original text are only necessary when the original wording is so unique and effective that re-writing it in any way would take away from the message. As such, use direct quotations sparingly; in many cases, a paraphrase or summary of the original text is more appropriate.

The following short video offers some additional explanation of when to quote, paraphrase or summarize an original text.

<http://en.writecheck.com/blog/2013/10/16/3-ways-to-avoid-plagiarism-summary-paraphrase-and-quote-video>