Preventing plagiarism: Paraphrasing

What is paraphrasing? Why paraphrasing?
Paraphrasing is a writing skill to restate other writers’ ideas into your own words. In other words, when you paraphrase, you rewrite or rephrase a passage in a style different from that of the original without changing the original meaning.

It is important to learn how to properly paraphrase in order to:

1. Reduce the use of direct quotes:
   Avoid extensive direct quotes in your writing. Use them only when you want to retain the distinctive language of the authors.

2. Demonstrate your understanding of others’ ideas:
   Articulate others’ ideas into your own paper using your own words so as to keep the coherence of language and style throughout your writing.

3. Avoid plagiarism:
   Rewrite the original text instead of simply substituting a few words or phrases. Changing only a few words and retaining basically the style and form of the original is “close paraphrasing”, which is also considered plagiarism even when the source is cited.

What is good paraphrasing?
Good paraphrasing:

1. Has different vocabulary from the original
2. Has a different sentence structure from the original
3. Conveys the same meaning as the original

How to paraphrase?

In order to paraphrase effectively, you have to understand thoroughly the meaning of the original passage. Then rewrite the passage using your own voice and style.

Steps for effective paraphrasing:

1. **Read** and reread the **passage** carefully to make sure you understand its meaning. Also read the sentences before and after this passage in order to put it into proper context. Consult a dictionary if needed.

2. Identify the ideas and emphases of the passage.

3. **Use your own words and style** to rewrite the passage and capture its meaning. Basic techniques are
   a. **Changing words** - to substitute synonyms for individual words.
      • Consult a thesaurus if needed. e.g. *Oxford Paperback Thesaurus* or *Roget’s II*
   b. **Changing sentence structure** - to rearrange the sequence of ideas in the passage.
      • e.g. Change the word order, the parts of speech (nouns to verbs, nouns to adjectives, adjectives to adverbs, etc.), the voices (active voice to passive voice). Combine or split the sentences

   Note that simply changing words is often NOT good enough for effective paraphrasing. Refer to **Example 1** below.

4. Do not twist the original meaning when you use other words and writing style.

5. Put unique terms or phrases in quotation marks, if needed, as part of the paraphrase. Refer to **Example 2** below.

6. **Reread your paraphrase** to make sure that it has a different vocabulary and style from the original, and that all information is accurately reproduced.

7. **Give credit** to your source.


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Paraphrasing vs. summarizing

To paraphrase is to restate a source completely, while to summarize is to restate only the main points of a source or of several sources. Refer to **Example 3** for examples of acceptable paraphrasing and summary.
Examples

Example 1: Changing words and sentence structure

Original
“Whatever your color, whatever your genes, you are not a criminal until you have committed a crime.”

Draft paraphrasing – Words changed
Whatever your race or genetic background, you are not a criminal until you break the law.

Final paraphrasing – Sentence structure changed
One is a criminal only when one breaks the law, regardless of his or her race or genetic background (Moore, 1992).


Example 2: Using direct quotes within paraphrases

Original
“Although communism and state socialism have failed to protect the environment, eco-extremists are basically anti-business.”

Final paraphrasing
“Eco-extremists” (p. 122) oppose business even though communist and socialist governments have permitted environmental degradation (Moore, 1992).

Example 3: Acceptable vs. unacceptable paraphrasing

Original
“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).


Acceptable paraphrasing
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).

Unacceptable paraphrasing
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 materials. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes (Lester, 1976).

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

(From: Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL). (2010). Paraphrase: Write it in your own words. Retrieved from: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/01/)