

Paraphrasing

*Do you find it difficult to write in your own words?
Do you end up copying from a textbook?*

What is a paraphrase?

A paraphrase is when you write the ideas of published authors in your own words without changing the original meaning. It is usually about the same length as the original.¹ It is important that the sentence structure and the vocabulary are not too similar to the original.

The two key steps to paraphrasing are:

- change the structure of the paragraph
- change the words

Avoiding plagiarism

Plagiarism is when you copy directly from someone else's work without acknowledging (citing) the original author. In other words, you take credit for someone else's work. In the university culture, this is regarded as the same as cheating on your exam.

Changing the structure of a paragraph

1. Write down only the main ideas and concepts

Do not copy slabs of text. Read the paragraph and write down only the main points or key words. Do not write down entire sentences.

¹ A **summary** is much shorter than a paraphrase and captures the essence or the main ideas of the text.

2. Put the original away so you can't see it

After you have read your information, put the book away and write down your paraphrase from memory. This means you are not copying out the text word for word.

3. Check your version against the original

Look back at the original text. Check that you have not accidentally written exactly the same words. Check that you have not left anything out. Check to see if you have captured the meaning of the writer (as closely as you can).

Changing the words

People's writing styles and the words they use are very distinct. It is generally easy to tell when someone has copied straight out of a textbook because the language changes and the words used are not normally part of the writer's style and vocabulary. Follow these steps:

1. Read the sentence to be paraphrased a number of times

You cannot paraphrase until you understand the meaning of the text. Once you understand, write down the meaning in your own words. If you do not understand the meaning of the text, do not try to paraphrase it – you'll only end up copying!

2. Circle the specialised words

Specialised words carry the main meaning. You will need to include them in your paragraph; otherwise you will change the meaning completely. So make sure that these specialised words are still in your paraphrase.

3. Underline keywords that can be changed

Identify the key words that can be changed without changing the meaning.

4. Find alternative words for the keywords

Find other words and phrases that have similar meanings that you can use to replace the words in the text. Use a thesaurus or dictionary to help you.