
PARAPHRASING

The Important Questions

SUNY Potsdam College Writing Center
Carson 106

WHAT WILL I LEARN?

In this tutorial, we'll go over:

- *the definition of a paraphrase,*
- *how paraphrases show your understanding of the texts you cite,*
- *and the line between paraphrasing and plagiarism.*

You'll find answers to some of the questions you may have about paraphrasing. You'll link to some webpages and videos that give specific tips. At the end of the tutorial, you'll apply all of this in two paraphrasing exercises. You can hand the exercises in to your teacher (if they assigned the tutorial in a class), or take them to a tutor at the College Writing Center for some feedback.

WHAT, EXACTLY, IS PARAPHRASING?

Paraphrasing is taking someone else's words and putting them into your own words—but without changing the original meaning. The original text might be an idea, opinion, fact, or research data. No matter what you borrow and put in your own words, you must cite it and use new wording.

Revise the original *completely* in your own words. You must rewrite the original author's words, totally changing the words and structure. Don't just make minor changes! If your version is too close to the original, that's plagiarism.

Paraphrasing is not the same as quoting. When you quote, you repeat the author's exact words, and you show this by putting them in quotation marks. When you paraphrase, on the other hand, you use your own words to talk about the author's idea, and you don't use quotation marks. **But, no matter whether you're quoting or paraphrasing, you *always* need to cite the source.**

LINK AND LEARN:

Watch [this short video](#), in which writer and tutor Paige Carrera explains how to correctly paraphrase.

RESPONSE EXERCISE ONE

Have you learned anything new? Have you felt confused about paraphrasing before? In a paragraph, explain your past experience with paraphrasing, and how this new information might help you in the future.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

There are consequences to this stuff, you know. Using paraphrases correctly or incorrectly greatly affects your writing as a student. Paraphrasing incorrectly leads quickly to plagiarism. And if you plagiarize, it can lead to failing an assignment, failing a class, or being expelled from school.

Even though plagiarism might seem like a quick fix when you're running late, it can lead to much more work over the long term. Even unintentional plagiarism can still have the same results.

There are some good consequences that come from paraphrasing, too. Good paraphrasing, with citations, will show your teacher that you are doing the hard work of researching, understanding, and communicating about the things you're learning in your class. Paraphrasing is one way that you can make a strong argument, and, in turn, earn respect for the work you've done.

THESE ARE THE RULES FOR PARAPHRASING:**DO these things:**

- work hard to understand the original passage—it's only when you understand the original that you can put it into new words effectively
- put the text in your own words
- use a citation every time, even when you've put the source in your own words
- use the correct form of in-text (parenthetical) citation and bibliography entry
- use credible sources—a good paraphrase of a bad source is still bad writing

DON'T make these common mistakes:

- don't change the meaning of the original text
- don't use the exact words—unless you use a direct quotation, and put them inside quotation marks
- don't copy and paste the passage and then make some minor changes—you need to change a source's words, structure, and order into your own work

ARE PARAPHRASES AND SUMMARIES THE SAME THING?

In both summary and paraphrase, you use your own words to explain the original text. But there are differences. A summary gives a broad overview of the key elements, or main points, of a text. A paraphrase provides more detail by restating a smaller section of the original text. A paraphrase usually includes most or all of the information from that small section of the original.

Remember, you need to cite **both** summaries and paraphrases!

Check out this [Purdue OWL page](#) that gives an explanation of the differences between quotations, paraphrases, and summaries – and when to use each.

Then, at [this other page from Purdue OWL](#), you can find a good example of summarizing and paraphrasing, as well as what plagiarism looks like.

WHY SHOULD I PARAPHRASE?

Paraphrasing allows you to show that you **understand** the information from the original source. Quoting can be useful, especially when the wording is especially powerful or unique, but it doesn't demonstrate your comprehension of material as well as paraphrasing does.

Paraphrasing establishes that you've read and thought through the information that has already been written about your topic. Paraphrasing shows that you understand the opinions of others and can explain them using your own words ("[Overview](#)").

It also allows you to apply the information to the claim in your paper. You can emphasize the information that is the most relevant to your topic, or show the depth of detail that will help your audience understand your perspective. After the paraphrase, you can add your perspective on the specific information you paraphrased, stating whether you agree or disagree, and take it even further by giving other sources or personal examples. Remember, though, to specify which ideas are yours and which are the source's by using in-text citations!

LINK AND LEARN:

Next, check out [this video](#) from University of Southern California. The video will help you define paraphrasing; it will also show you how to work toward writing a great paraphrase and how to reduce the risk of

unintentional plagiarism.

- ✓ *Note! This video uses APA style. You'll need to use whatever style your professor requires. Check out the "How should I cite my paraphrases?" section below to get some basics on a couple of different styles.*

RESPONSE EXERCISE TWO

Write a short paragraph naming and explaining one point from this video that is new to you, or a concept or reminder that might help you in the future. Explain why it's important, according to the video.

WHERE IS THE LINE BETWEEN PARAPHRASING AND PLAGIARISM?

If you purposefully leave out -- or forget to include -- a citation for a paraphrase, that is **plagiarism!** Teachers know paraphrases when they see them. Even though the paraphrase is in your words, the original idea is not yours. If you don't cite your paraphrase, you're stealing the source's content.

So every time you paraphrase, put an in-text citation in the sentence, and always include all of the information for the source in your bibliography.

If your paraphrase is too close to the original wording, it also is technically plagiarism! Be thorough when writing the paraphrase to make sure that you are using different words. You could use synonyms, rephrasing, reordering, and elaborating. Remember, keep the original meaning, but put it in different words. If you can't find a way to reword the source, put it in quotes (keeping it exactly like the original!). Believe us—students get charged with plagiarism for failing to cite paraphrases, and for paraphrasing poorly. If you're still not sure how to tell if your wording is too close, don't worry... we'll look at that more closely in the exercises at the end of the tutorial. **The general advice: when in doubt, cite it!**

Check out this explanation from Colorado State University:

"When paraphrasing or summarizing, avoid copying the unique phrasing or terminology found in your source material. Many students have been charged with plagiarism for using words that are clearly too sophisticated or well-crafted to be their own. . . Such language includes terminology bound to raise the proverbial 'red flag' when your instructor reads your work. He or she is more likely than not to be familiar with your source and, if not, will discover [it] . . . When struck by particularly impressive or compelling phrasing, it is better to

quote and document it rather than represent it as your own in a paraphrase or summary.” ([“Warning: On Copying Unique Phrasing or Terminology”](#))

WHERE IS THE LINE BETWEEN PARAPHRASING AND PLAGIARISM? CONTINUED

RISKY BUSINESS—DON'T GO THERE!

Sometimes when students paraphrase, they end up accidentally plagiarizing by:

- keeping the original words or sentence structure in the paraphrase without using quotation marks
- citing only the first time they paraphrase, instead of including an in-text citation for every paraphrase
- using three or more exact words without quotation marks or citing the source

WHY SHOULD I CITE?

The simple answer is: You are expected to cite. Through your citations, you give the authors credit, you help readers (including teachers) tell which parts of the paper are yours and which you've drawn from others' work, and you supply readers with the information they need to look into your source further.

- ✓ *Note! If you want to explore the why behind citation a bit more, look up our tutorial called, “The Basics of Citation.”*

WHEN SHOULD I CITE A PARAPHRASE?

In high school, a lot of us learned that if we rewrite the source materials in our own words, then we didn't have to cite it. That's wrong. When you put some else's work in your own words, that's a paraphrase. And anytime you write a paraphrase, you must cite!

- ✓ *Note! If you want more information about the sources you're using, check out our tutorial, “The Basics of Citation.”*

HOW SHOULD I CITE MY PARAPHRASES?

After paraphrasing in your essay, you need to add an in-text citation at the end of the sentence. The exact formatting of the citation depends on what documentation style you're using in your class (if you don't remember, check—it's really important).

HOW TO CITE IN MLA

If you are using MLA documentation, you need to use the author's last name and the page number of the information you paraphrased, with no punctuation. Include this information in parenthesis, and put the period after the closing parenthesis. If the source is only one page long, or has no page numbers, then simply leave out the page numbers. Also, if you used the author's name in the same sentence as the paraphrase, then just put the page number in the parenthesis.

Examples:

As a student writer, paraphrasing is an important tool (Murphy 6).

Murphy explains that paraphrasing is an important tool for student writers (6).

HOW TO CITE IN APA

If you're using APA documentation, it's best if you use the author's last name in the sentence. Immediately after the name, put the year of publication in parenthesis. However, if you don't, include all information in a parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence—the author's last name and year of publication, separated by a comma. Just like MLA, the period comes after the closing parenthesis. **It's recommended** to include page numbers for paraphrases, but not always required; check with your teacher to see what they expect.

Examples:

Murphy (2009) explains that paraphrasing is an important tool for student writers (p. 6).

As a student writer, paraphrasing is an important tool (Murphy, 2009, p. 6).

Also—for all citation styles, including MLA and APA, you'll need to include a full bibliography entry for each source, as well as your in-text citation. If you need to brush up on what these entries look like, check out our other CWC tutorials. Or, if you need to use a citation style other than MLA or APA, look up the other style-specific tutorials and links on our website.

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

So, you've gone through this tutorial, reading, linking, and responding. Are you ready to confidently put paraphrases in your papers?

- We covered *the definition of a paraphrase* as using your own words to convey the ideas that are given in another source, with an in-text citation to show where the reader can find that source. We defined the differences between paraphrasing, summarizing and quoting.
- We talked about *how paraphrases show* that you are interacting and understanding the ideas of others, even more than direct quotes; paraphrases also let you show the key information from the source.
- Finally, we looked at *the line between paraphrasing and plagiarism*, and how to avoid plagiarism by using basic citations. Remember, whenever you are taking information from another source, you must cite it.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE HELP?

Here's a few websites that you should bookmark and head back to anytime you're working with paraphrasing and citations... or really, any other part of writing a paper.

- [Diana Hacker](#)
- [Purdue Owl](#)
- [Cite Source](#)

SCROLL DOWN TO FIND OUR PARAPHRASING EXERCISES ONE AND TWO.

PARAPHRASING EXERCISE ONE: HOW CAN I WRITE A GREAT PARAPHRASE?

LINK AND LEARN

Read these two pages from The Writing University @ The University of Wisconsin – Madison to help you sort through the process of learning how to write a paraphrase. **These are “must reads” for every student writer!**

[“How to paraphrase a source”](#) gives step by step directions and specific techniques that might help you out.

[“Successful vs. unsuccessful paraphrases”](#) explains what makes a paraphrase work, and gives examples to help you identify plagiarized and legitimate paraphrases.

A couple ideas for writing the best paraphrase you can:

- Take notes as you read (be sure to mark what words are direct quotes, and what paraphrasing work you’ve already done—if you don’t, writing paraphrases from these notes could get you in trouble pretty quick)
- Re-read a section before paraphrasing
- Write as if you were explaining the original words to someone in your family or a good friend—or, you could actually grab someone to listen as you compose the paraphrase out loud

Now, do it! Paraphrase a section from points 1-4 under sub-heading C in [SUNY Potsdam’s Academic Honor Code](#). Include an in-text citation at the end of your paraphrase with this information (we’ve made it easy for you!):

Author: SUNY Potsdam Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards

Year of publication: n.d.

Page numbers: none (don’t use page numbers for a web page or document, unless it’s a PDF file with page numbers)

Use the citation style your teacher requires in your course – MLA, APA, Chicago, etc. For more info, check out Purdue OWL’s [“Paraphrase: Write It in Your Own Words”](#) to find some other examples and tips.

PARAPHRASING EXERCISE TWO: GET SOME MORE PRACTICE!

*Your professor might ask you to paraphrase some excerpts from course material instead.

Paraphrase any three of the five passages on [this page](#) from Purdue OWL. After each paraphrase, insert an in-text citation using the author or article title, which is given at the end of each excerpt on the web page. (Don't collaborate with peers.)

Index of Websites
(in order given in document)

[this short video](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD-kK6bWwSE>

[Purdue OWL page](#)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/1/>

[this other page from Purdue OWL](#)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/02/>

[“Overview”](#)

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/page.cfm?pageid=295>

[this video](#)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ffCo1Zc9xo

[“Warning: On Copying Unique Phrasing or Terminology”](#)

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/page.cfm?pageid=316>

[Diana Hacker](#)

http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch08_o.html

[Purdue Owl](#)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

[Cite Source](#)

<http://citesource.trincoll.edu/mla/index.html>

[“How to paraphrase a source”](#)

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_paraphrase2.html

[“Successful vs. unsuccessful paraphrases”](#)

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_paraphrase.html

[SUNY Potsdam’s Academic Honor Code](#)

<http://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/honorcode/index.cfm>

[“Paraphrase: Write It in Your Own Words”](#)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/2/>

[this page](#)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/2/>

Works Cited

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- "Overview: Paraphrasing." *Writing@CSU*. Colorado State University, n.d. Web. 5 Mar. 2013.
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