Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing basics

This lesson will help you integrate the work of other people into your writing.

Academic writing requires you to draw on the research and ideas of others to support your own argument and approach. Paraphrasing is a way of doing this while avoiding copying directly from texts (plagiarism).

In this lesson
Understanding paraphrasing
Activity 1
Summarising
Activity 2
Synthesising

Understanding Paraphrasing

What is a paraphrase?
A paraphrase is a restatement in your own words of an idea or item of information from the work of another person. You convey the original meaning but change the words and sentence structure. You must reference a paraphrase with the author's name and the year of publication.

There are limits to the amount of work you can paraphrase. The aim is to integrate a sentence expressing the borrowed idea into a paragraph of your own writing. If you want to use more than one idea from another text, you need to ensure that you paraphrase and reference each idea separately.

To paraphrase, you need to:

change the structure of the sentence(s), and change words

Avoiding plagiarism
Plagiarism is the direct copying of someone else's work without acknowledging (citing) the original author. In other words, you take credit for the ideas of another person. In academic writing, this is considered cheating. Avoid penalties by learning how to paraphrase correctly.
• Changing the structure of a sentence
• Read the relevant sentence/s and make sure you understand the main idea. Do not copy them down.
• Put the article or book away and write your paraphrase from memory. This means that you are not copying the text word for word.
• Ensure that you have changed the order of words.

To avoid accidental plagiarism, check what you have written against the original text. You should check that your version is different and you have retained the original idea.

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 directly from a textbook, as the language and the words used change from the writer's normal style and vocabulary. To paraphrase a text, follow these steps.

• Read the sentence/paragraph you want to paraphrase a number of times to get the meaning of the text. Once you understand it, write out the sentence in your own words. If you do not fully understand the text, do not attempt to paraphrase it, as you will just copy it.
• Circle the specialised words, i.e. the words that the text is actually about. These will need to be included in your paraphrase, as without these words, the meaning of the paraphrase will change completely.

• Underline the keywords that can be changed. You now have a starting point to construct your paraphrase.
• Find other words and phrases that have similar meanings that can be used to replace the keywords in the text. Use a thesaurus or dictionary to help if need be.

Example of paraphrasing where key words are circled and words that can be replaced are underlined.

The United States, Germany, Japan and other industrial powers are being transformed from industrial economies to knowledge and information based service economies, whilst manufacturing has been moving to low wage countries. In a knowledge and information based economy, knowledge and information are the key ingredients in creating wealth.

(From Laudon & Laudon, 2002, *Management Information Systems: Managing the Digital Firm*. p 5.)

EXAMPLE 1
Read the original text, then select the best paraphrase out of the two options below.

Original text
The United States, Germany and Japan and other industrial nations are being transformed from industrial economies to knowledge and information based service economies, whilst manufacturing has been moving to low wage countries. In a knowledge and information based economy, knowledge and information are the key ingredients in creating wealth.
From: Laudon & Laudon (2000), Management information systems: managing the digital firm, p 31.

Paraphrase 1

> The United States, Germany, Japan and other economies are being dramatically changed from industrial economies to knowledge and information based economies as manufacturing shifts to countries where the wages are low cost. In knowledge and information based economies, knowledge and information are the focus in economic growth (Laudon & Laudon, 2000).

Some keywords have been changed but the sentence structure has not been changed. Paraphrase 1 is too similar to the original text.

Paraphrase 2

> As manufacturing has moved to countries where wages are low, developed countries such as The United States, Germany and Japan have to turn to knowledge and information-based services to drive economic growth (Laudon & Laudon, 2000).

This is the better paraphrase. The keywords and the sentence structure have been changed.

Summarising

What is a summary?
A summary is a short and concise representation of the main points, ideas, concepts, facts or statements of a text written in your own words. Unlike a paraphrase, which is generally of a similar length to the original text, a summary is much shorter.

When either summarising or paraphrasing, you should not alter:

- the author's original idea(s)
- the degree of certainty with which the ideas are expressed.

Referencing

Summaries need to be referenced. Whether you have summarised or paraphrased an author's words, thoughts, ideas, etc., a citation to the original source of the words, thoughts, ideas, etc. must be provided.

Summarising (cont.)

To create/write a good summary, you should read the article or text a number of times to develop a clear understanding of:

the author's ideas and intentions
the meaning and details
the force with which the ideas are expressed.

How to write a summary
Use the following steps to write a summary:

Step 1
Write notes in point form using keywords; this will make it easier to express the ideas in your own words.

Step 2
Write the summary directly from your notes without re-reading the passage.

Step 3
Refer back to the original to ensure that your summary is a true reflection of the writer's ideas.

- Topic sentences provide a quick outline of the main idea(s) presented in a paragraph.
- When summarising a chapter or article, the introduction and conclusion should provide a good overview of the content.

Example
Time management is a critical skill for all students to develop. Weekly and semester timetables are an excellent way to plan a study program. Students can use them to manage their most important study, work and social commitments and to set themselves study goals. Blocks of time can then be set aside for study, reading, researching and writing. The most urgent tasks can be addressed, whilst work continues on preparing for lectures, tutorials and assignments. If time has been allocated for specific purposes, it is easier to avoid unexpected demands like phone calls, visitors and invitations. Assignments can be completed and submitted on time and to a satisfactory standard.

Summary
Effective time management allows students to utilise their time in order to successfully complete their study requirements.

EXAMPLE 2

Read the original text, then select the best summary out of the three options below.

Original text

Studying in a new environment is different and therefore can be stressful. Tertiary students come from a variety of backgrounds and are studying for different purposes. Students may have come straight from secondary school, they may be a 'mature age' student who has decided to pursue another career, or they may be an international student and have just arrived in Australia. For many students whatever their background, tertiary learning is different from their previous studies. Students may be worried about the amount of reading required, or whether they will be able to study efficiently enough to get through their exams. They may also worry about the tertiary learning expectations and requirements.

Paraphrase 1

> Students from different backgrounds, including secondary, mature age and international, are concerned about the amount of reading in tertiary study.

This summary represents the student group reasonably well, but reading is the only challenge mentioned. The problems of the original are broader and more specific. The notion of 'stress ' or 'a new learning environment' have been omitted in the summary.

Paraphrase 2

> Tertiary learning is often a new environment, especially for international students as they are unsure of what is expected of them.

This summary is not inaccurate although not the best. It emphasises international students which does not reflect the original. The original specifies problems (i.e. reading and exams) that are not implicit in the words "Being unsure of what is expected".

Paraphrase 3

> For many students, including those from diverse backgrounds, it is often difficult to adapt to new tertiary learning environments. Managing workloads, understanding expectations and how to study effectively for exams can be extremely stressful.

An accurate and well-balanced summary.

Synthesising

What is synthesising?
Synthesising is an important and complex skill required in academic writing. Synthesising involves combining ideas from a range of sources in order to group and present common ideas or arguments. It is a necessary skill used in essays, literature reviews and other forms of academic writing.

Unlike summarising and paraphrasing, which only uses one author's ideas at a time, synthesising combines ideas from more than one text or source.
Synthesising allows you to:

combine information and ideas from multiple sources to develop and strengthen your argument(s)
demonstrate that you have read widely on the topic
use and cite multiple sources.

How to synthesise

Use the following steps to synthesise information from different sources.

Read relevant material.
Make brief notes using key points /key words. This makes it easier to compare and contrast relevant information.

Identify common ideas.
Cite (reference) all the authors you have used.
Note-taking for synthesising
Write down the main points. Remember to cite the references.

Topic: English is the global world language

Text 1 (Watson 2011)

- international language for business
- used for international forums (e.g. UN)
- second language in many countries

Text 2 (Lui 2010)

- used in worldwide technology
- computers key factor in spread of English
- internationalisation of education

Text 3 (Hannan 2009)

- small number of speakers worldwide
- importance of English linked to US power, i.e. 'Political'
- more people speak Chinese worldwide

Text 4 (Dowd 2011)

- minority of speakers in world
- Chinese dominant especially in future
- English will decline in future

Writing a synthesis from notes

Look at your notes and identify similar and contradictory arguments. Group these together to develop/support your arguments. Cite references appropriately.

Supporting ideas of Watson and Lui

Supporting the contention that English is the dominant world language, Watson (2011) and Lui (2010) point out its importance as the medium of international communication in business, technology and other global forums. However, others argue that despite its apparent dominance, English is not the global language when the number of native speakers of other languages, e.g. Chinese, are considered (Hannan 2009; Dowd 2011).

Weaving together similar ideas that contradict the previous statement

Reference citations

Example

In the example below, notice the way the writer has organised and referenced information from multiple sources. Several authors' ideas on extroversion are grouped in pink and the other authors' ideas on introversion are grouped in blue. References are in orange.

Individuals are classified as either an extrovert or an introvert. Extroversion describes people who are outgoing, sociable, assertive, and optimistic and are in search of excitement (McAdams 2006; McShane & Travaglione 2007). Extroverts are confident in their abilities to accomplish tasks effectively and have faith in themselves. They enjoy risk taking, but can be unreliable and can lose their temper easily (Mathews, Deary & Whiteman 2003). Extroverts also focus more on the positive aspects and outcomes of life and therefore they have a greater level of self confidence. On the other hand, introverts are described as being shy, quiet, withdrawn, less likely to make bad impulsive decisions and are more cautious in their actions (Matthews, Deary & Whiteman 2003; McAdams 2006; McShane & Traviglione 2007). As a consequence, introverts are more likely to place weight on the negative outcomes and aspects of social situations (McAdams 2006) and prefer to be alone, whereas extroverts have the ability to make friends quickly.