

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is when you reword a short section of writing into your own words. Paraphrasing is similar to summarising since it involves putting the author(s)' words into your own words. However, paraphrasing is different to summarising because it focuses on just one or two ideas in the source rather than capturing the main idea of the entire source. Paraphrasing is an important skill that demonstrates your ability to articulate an author's idea or piece of evidence in your own words and in turn your understanding of the content. Paraphrasing is useful in supporting your argument with evidence rephrased in your own words. The idea is still the same as the original and must be correctly acknowledged. A paraphrase will always require a citation.

What is bad paraphrasing?

The hardest step of paraphrasing is in putting the text into your own words. A bad paraphrase occurs when the the words and structure of the sentence is too similar to the original text. For instance, if the original text is the sentence below:

ORIGINAL TEXT
“While sensation fiction does not generally include overtly occult episodes, it does use occultized images to depict crime and social evils” (Steere 2008, p. 302).

Then a bad paraphrase would be:

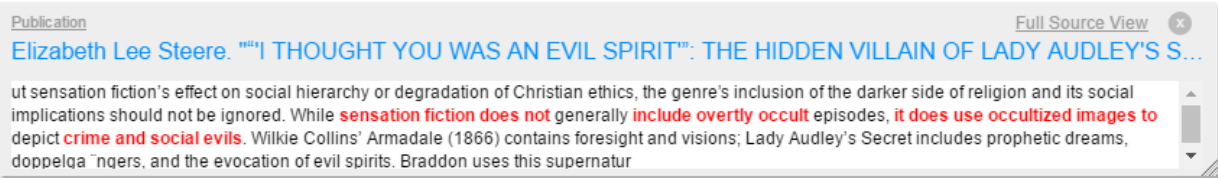
BAD PARAPHRASE
Although sensation fiction does not in general include overtly occult scenes, it does use occultized images to show crime and social evils (Steere 2008, p. 302).

This is bad because only a few of the words are changed, and the structure of the sentence is too much the same. It does not show the student's understanding of the concept. A paraphrase is considered good when it shows your understanding of the idea. You might find it useful to approach paraphrasing using a series of steps that are outlined below.

Bad paraphrasing in Turnitin

Turnitin can help you identify when paraphrasing is too similar to the original source. The example below shows a writer's attempt at paraphrasing the above information. Turnitin has identified a match to many of the words. The original source has been revealed and shows how the writing closely resembles the original article. Although the writer has included a reference, this is an indication to this writer that they should rephrase this sentence as the words and phrasing are too close to the original.

1
Although sensation fiction does not in general include overtly occult scenes, it does use occultized images to show crime and social evils. (Steere 2008, p. 302).



If you get a text match like this one, it is a sign that you need to explain the idea differently. The following section offers advice on how to paraphrase well.

Paraphrasing: Identify what you understand

Paraphrasing is a crucial component of academic writing. In many disciplines, paraphrasing is preferred over quoting. This is because when you paraphrase, you also demonstrate your understanding and critical analysis of the text. There are a range of ways to paraphrase effectively, including the following steps and strategies.

Select the text

First, select the section of the text that you want to use. For example, say that you wanted to paraphrase the following text:

ORIGINAL TEXT:

“While sensation fiction does not generally include overtly occult episodes, it does use occultized images to depict crime and social evils” (Steere 2008, p. 302).

Your next step would be to figure out what it is that you understand in the text, and put that into your own words.

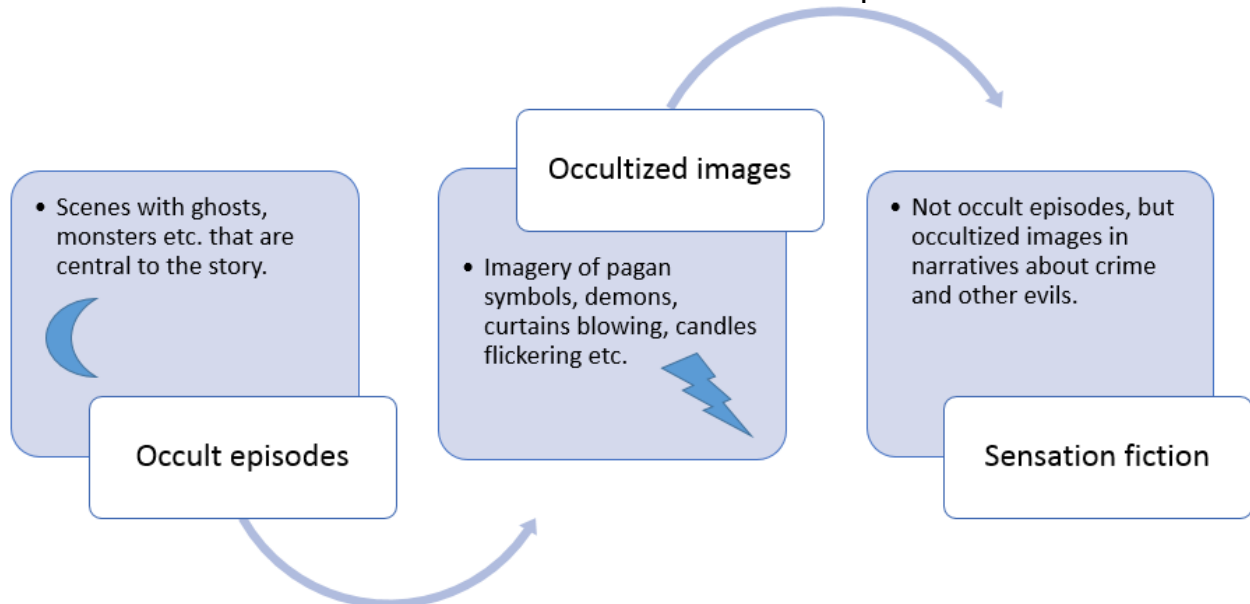
Ask yourself what you understand from the text

To help put the idea in your own words, it is useful to ask yourself what you think the text means. You could ask the following questions to do this:

- What is the main idea here?
 - How could I explain this idea to someone who doesn't know the topic?
 - What do I understand about this and what do I not understand?
 - How could I explain this idea to another person in my class?
 - How could I break this information down into smaller parts?
 - What do each of the smaller parts of this information mean?

If you are finding it difficult to answer these questions, you could instead test out these strategies:

- Read the sentence out aloud, then look away from the sentence and try to explain the idea (it may be useful to record yourself doing this, so that you can listen back to what you said)
- Draw a diagram of the information and then explain to yourself or to someone else the connections between the ideas. For example:



The bad-to-good paraphrasing method

Another option that you could try would be to first of all to do a bad paraphrase, then keep on changing it to help you explain the information differently. First, start by changing the words that you can change into words that you understand more clearly. For instance, you could say:

Sensation fiction does not usually include very overt occult episodes, but it does use occult images when it shows crime and social problems (Steere 2008, p. 302)

Now, you would have to change this bad paraphrase again, to make it more different from the original text. One way that you could do this would be to change the order of the information. For instance, you could write:

Sensation fiction uses occult images when it depicts crime and social problems, although it does not use openly occult episodes (Steere 2008, p. 302).

However, this is still too close to the original, and doesn't necessarily show your understanding of the idea. You could at this point aim to separate the information and explain it to yourself using simple words. For instance, separating the information out might look like this:

- Sensation fiction uses occult images in scenes to do with crime and other social problems (Steere 2008, p. 302).
- But occult images are different to occult episodes (Steere 2008, p. 302).
- Occult episodes are often long and intense, and make the reader question whether or not they are real (Brown 2010).
- This means that they are distinct scenes, whereas occult images are only subtle things like when a thief's quickness is compared to a ghost - but the author is not suggesting that the thief is actually a ghost.
- According to Steere, sensation fiction only uses subtle, occult images, not distinct scenes (Steere 2008, p. 302).

From here, you can see more easily how the information fits together. You can also see that while doing this, the student has been careful to use citations to note down where the information came from. Although it may not look like this in the final version, this is a useful strategy when drafting to remind yourself which ideas need citations.

The next step is to put the idea in your own words and show your own understanding.

Paraphrasing: Put the idea in your own words

Once you understand the ideas, it is time to write a paraphrase using your own words. For example, based on our understanding of the idea presented in the original sentence:

Original text:

“While sensation fiction does not generally include overtly occult episodes, it does use occultized images to depict crime and social evils” (Steere 2008, p. 302).

A fair paraphrase would be something like the following:

Sensation fiction uses elements of the occult when it depicts crime and social problems, although it cannot be said to use distinctly occult scenes (Steere 2008, p. 302).

This is a fair example of paraphrasing, as it explains the main idea clearly in the student's own words. When we put this paraphrase into Turnitin, it did not find a text match.

Here is another example of a fair paraphrase, which Turnitin did not identify as a text match. You can see that the student has used the author's name in their sentence, to make it clear that the idea belongs to the author:

Steere (2008, p. 302) has observed that when sensation fiction focuses on social problems, it occasionally uses imagery that is supernatural but does not present entire occult scenes.

While these are all fair examples of text matches, they don't show us the student's own critical analysis of the idea. Finally, to emphasise your own critical interpretation of the ideas, you can consider the final step below.

Paraphrasing: Show your critical interpretation

When you are ready to do this, it is also important to think about what part of the idea you want to emphasise. You can also at this stage think about how you're going to show your critical interpretation of the idea. Is it an important idea? Is it an unusual idea? Do you agree or disagree with it? You can signal your critical interpretation of the idea in the types of words that you use to paraphrase. For example, you could show a lot of critical interpretation by adding a few words like the ones highlighted in these examples:

1. Example of a paraphrase showing agreement with the source text

Steere (2008, p. 302) convincingly argues that when sensation fiction focuses on social problems, it occasionally uses imagery that is supernatural but does not present entire occult scenes.

2. Example of a paraphrase showing disagreement with the source text

In one problematic account, Steere (2008, p. 302) asserts that sensation fiction uses elements of the occult when it depicts crime and social problems, but that it does not use distinctly occult scenes. Analysis of sensation texts does not support this view, as for example, in the book ...

These added phrases ("convincingly argues", "In one problematic account") indicate much more about your interpretation or assessment of the idea. You would then in most cases need to support your assessment with some evidence to explain why the theory is either ground-breaking, convincing, or unusual. To learn more about how to show your critical interpretation within your writing, you can go to this site's section on Authorial Voice.

Summarising: Start with your question

A summary is a succinct overview of a source, which distils the key ideas of the author's argument. It is much shorter than the original text, which could be several paragraphs in length to an entire book. Similar to paraphrasing, when summarising you articulate the author's argument or ideas in **your own words**. Summarising demonstrates your critical engagement with an author's argument by the way you selectively choose to highlight relevant aspects of the source. The ideas are still the same as the original and must use a citation.

In order to summarise effectively, you need to be able to identify the relevant information for your purpose. When you read, it will save you time and energy in the long run to start by identifying the question that you want to answer while reading the text. Tutorial questions, essay questions, and research questions are key places to find questions that can guide you through the reading. If you're doing reading for **tutorials** that don't have set questions, it's a good idea to develop some of your own. For instance, how does the reading demonstrate the week's topic? How is it similar or different to the other ideas that the course presents?

Once you know your question, it is time to search through the text to see how it answers your question. For the following example, we're using the question: to what extent do the outcomes of bush burning practices justify their risks to wildlife?

Summarising: Identify the main idea and subpoints

Once you know your question, it is time to search through the text to see how it answers your question. This involves assessing how relevant the text is for your assignment question or topic. For the following example, we're using the question: to what extent do the outcomes of bush burning practices justify their risks to wildlife?

Since a summary gives an overview of a source, you need to understand the author(s)' argument. Reading strategically can help you to quickly identify this. To find the author(s)' main argument, first read through the source's abstract (if it has one), its introduction, and its conclusion. This should give you a general idea of the main argument.

For example, read the journal article abstract below. Can you identify the main argument?

Studies of conservation in small scale societies typically portray indigenous peoples as either sustainably managing resources, or forsaking long-term sustainability for short-term gains. To explain this variability, we propose an alternative framework derived from a co-evolutionary perspective. In environments with long histories of consistent interaction, we suggest that local species will frequently be well adapted to human disturbance; but where novel interactions are introduced, human disturbance may have negative environmental consequences. To test this co-evolutionary hypothesis, we examine the effect of Aboriginal burning and hunting on hill kangaroo (*Macropus robustus*) abundance. We find that hill kangaroo populations peak at intermediate levels of human disturbance, showing that in ecosystems characterized by long-term human-environmental interactions, humans can act as trophic mediators, resulting in patterns consistent with epiphenomenal conservation. Framing the question within this co-evolutionary perspective provides an explanation for the underlying mechanisms that drive environmental outcomes of subsistence practices.

Abstract from p. 659 of: Codding, BF, Bird, RB, Kauhanen, PG, & Bird, DW 2014, 'Conservation or co-evolution? Intermediate levels of Aboriginal burning and hunting have positive effects on kangaroo populations in Western Australia', *Human Ecology*, vol. 42, no. 5, pp. 659-669.

Based on this abstract, we can see that the authors' argument is "In environments with long histories of consistent interaction, we suggest that local species will frequently be well adapted to human disturbance; but where novel interactions are introduced, human disturbance may have negative environmental consequences" (Codding et al. 2014, p. 659). In other words, Codding et al. are hypothesising that humans' impact on animals and the environment may be worse if human intervention is irregular rather than consistent. Their findings support this argument.

For our essay on whether the outcomes of burning practices justify their risk to wildlife, we can see that this article provides useful evidence because the authors are arguing that regular bush burning causes the least risk to wildlife.

Identify the subpoints

Now that you understand the main argument, to identify the key ideas and subpoints within the author(s)' argument, the next step is to skim through the subheadings and, when you find a very relevant section to answer your question, the topic sentences of that section. A topic sentence is the first sentence of a paragraph. Just reading through topic sentences should give you an indication of which parts you want to study in detail.

For example, from reading the topic sentences in the article and putting them into our own words, we have found that the author's key points include:

- Humans significantly affect wildlife (Coddington et al. 2014, p. 660)
- The theory of co-evolution can show us whether humans' influence is negative or positive (p. 660)
- Places where Aboriginal practices of burning (and hunting) have regularly occurred provide the location for testing the hypothesis (p. 660)
- Kangaroos are prevalent in those areas (p. 665)
- Kangaroos do best with a medium amount of human interference, and bush burning has a larger positive impact compared to hunting (p. 665)
- The technique of burning is highly encouraged to maintain wildlife survival (p. 666)

Summarising: Translate the ideas into your own words

Now that you have identified the key ideas, you can select the parts that you think are most relevant to answer your question, and study them in detail. For your summary, it is at this stage where you might identify further ideas that are worth pointing out.

When you study texts in detail, don't simply highlight - otherwise you might end up with a whole page of neon yellow and this can be hard to reread later. Instead, take notes of your own. This will enable you to process the information more effectively. Ask yourself questions as you go, identify what you don't understand, show yourself the links between the different ideas by using arrows, numbers, explanations and so forth, and note down how the text answers your question.

Summarising the article

To write a good summary, you need to put the author(s)' ideas in your own words. Some strategies to do this include:

- Closing the article and opening a blank page where you write down in your own words what you thought the article was about
- Translating the author's main argument into words and phrases that you prefer and are able to easily understand
- Looking at your notes and writing another summary of your notes using different words

For example, based on the notes we took when we analysed the article in the 4 steps above, a succinct summary might be: Coddington et al.'s (2014) findings demonstrate that Aboriginal practices of regular and moderate-impact bush burning and hunting have a positive effect on sustaining kangaroo populations.

In this example, we have summarised the key argument of the whole article, without having to quote or paraphrase. Notice that a citation is still necessary, because the ideas still belong to Coddington et al., but that the citation does not include a page number because the idea is expressed throughout the entire article.

What should a summary look like in Turnitin?

Generally Turnitin will not find matches with summaries unless you have selected phrases that directly match the original source. You will usually find that the

references that accompany your summaries and other sources will find matches in Turnitin. The example below illustrates how a summary with its accompanying reference might look on a Turnitin originality report.

Codding et al.'s (2014) findings demonstrate that Aboriginal practices of regular and moderate-impact bush burning and hunting have a positive effect on sustaining kangaroo populations.