"Saying it in your own words" is a common description of paraphrasing. It sounds easy. So long as you *have* "your own words." And so long as you understand the text you are putting *into* "your own words."

A paraphrase is different from a summary. A summary gives the main ideas of the original text. A summary leaves out some of the details or maybe all of them. Your paraphrase should not leave out anything from the text—or the part of the text—that you are paraphrasing.

A paraphrase is different from an opinion. Your paraphrase should not express your opinions about the original text. It should not say whether the text is well written. It should not say whether the ideas are good. It should say what the text says—but "in your own words."

There are many reasons you might paraphrase a text, but you are basically telling what the text says without using a direct quote. Here is a text:

After school the children lined up and walked to their busses. It was windy and cold that day, but many of the children had not brought their coats.

Here is a direct quote of part of the text:

The text says, "It was windy and cold that day, but many of the children had not brought their coats."

* Notice that the part of the text that is quoted is given in exactly the same words as are in the original text.
* This is not too long of a quote, so it does not *have* to be paraphrased.
* However, it is not such a wonderfully expressive piece of writing that you should avoid paraphrasing it. Paraphrasing will not spoil its beauty.

So, here is a paraphrase of the same part of the text:

1. It was a cold, windy day, but many children did not have coats.

Here is another paraphrase:

1. Many children had no coats, despite the cold and wind that day.

Many of the words are the same in both of them. There are 17 words in the sentence we have paraphrased from the original text.

1. It was a cold, windy day, but many children did not have coats. 10/13 or 10/17
2. Many children had no coats, despite the cold and wind that day. 5/12 or 5/17

The overall goal of learning to paraphrase: From reading an original text you can make your own sentences and phrases. Your new sentences and phrases keep the meaning of the original text and may even clarify it for you and your readers.

Here are the skills you will can to accomplish that goal:

You can break larger sentences into smaller sentences.

You can make larger sentences from smaller sentences.

You can move words and phrases within sentences.

You can move sentences within paragraphs.\*

You can change participial phrases into predicates.

You can change predicates into participial phrases.

You can change passive constructions to active ones.

You can change active constructions to passive ones.

You can add the words that have been left out but are implied through ellipsis.

You can use ellipsis to leave out words.

You can substitute synonyms for less familiar words.

You can substitute antecedents for pronouns.

You can substitute pronouns for antecedents.

You can replace words and phrases for the variables that can stand for them (e.g., otherwise, elsewhere).

You can substitute variables (e.g., otherwise, elsewhere) for words and phrases they can replace.

Beyond paraphrasing:

You can add examples.\*

You can add counter-examples.\*

You can add similes, analogies, and metaphors.\*

You can add words identifying the original text's structure.\*

You can add words identifying the original text's rhetorical devices.\*

\*These are very useful skills to master. However, they are not included on this website because of their complexity and open-endedness.