**Paraphrasing in academic writing**

When you write academically using source material there are times when you need to convey precisely information that is derived from evidence you are using.

### **What is the difference between paraphrasing and quoting?**

A **quote** means that you are directly using the words of a person in your work, for example:

* ‘It is self evident that Marmite is the best food stuff in the world’
* “No, Marmite is just awful, no way never”

The first quote is from a written source and so is in single inverted commas ‘’.

The second quote is from a spoken source and so is in double inverted commas “”

This convention is not always used in this way, sometimes single inverted commas are used for all types of quotations.

**Paraphrasing** means you are using the ideas from a source, but you are rewording them, retaining meaning, but making the use of the ideas your own. This involves more than just changing a few words, but instead is about making the ideas fit within your writing and using the intellectual content of the original author.

Generally, quotations gain less credit than paraphrasing because quoting is simply copying the words of others, whereas paraphrasing involves you thinking about and processing the ideas to produce your own original writing.

### **How do I paraphrase?**

#### Your aim when paraphrasing is to:

* Include the ideas of others within your thinking and consequently your writing.
* To change the emphasis of ideas from the source material to use them within your argument(s).
* To ensure your writing has a clear voice that is you and is not directly connected to other works.

#### You can follow the following steps when completing paraphrasing:

1. Read the original source material and make sure you understand what it means. You may need to use other sources to find out about the ideas in the source.
2. You may wish to take notes at this stage to help with the clarity of your understanding.
3. Think about why you want to use the idea(s) from the source. What purpose will it serve in your argument or section of writing?
4. Write the first draft of your paraphrased writing in the draft of your academic writing, or separately.
5. Check the draft; does it capture the meaning and ideas from the original source?
6. Add your citation, using the appropriate referencing style dictated by your department.
7. Finalise your writing - this may take time and you may re-write a paraphrased section multiple times as your overall piece of academic writing develops.

### **When should I paraphrase?**

There are some times when it is appropriate to quote. For example, at times, when quoting directly from a novel or film script, using the exact words is what is expected. But, it is essential that you show the reader why you have quoted and incorporate the quote into the overall argument.

Mostly, it is not appropriate to quote directly, but to paraphrase in some form or other. If you have learned to paraphrase as part of learning the English language, **academic paraphrasing is different**. Your aim is to use the ideas/information/theories/facts from a source of evidence within your writing. This means that you have to process the ideas within your brain before producing writing that adds to your argument/point/thinking as you complete your overall academic writing task.

Due to most academic writing involving the use of evidence to form, explain and articulate your thinking and therefore your writing, paraphrasing is used constantly in academic writing. You are always using ideas from others, reworded to match your thinking and argumentation/commentary so the reader can understand the points you are making.

### **Tips for paraphrasing**

* Academic paraphrasing is not just rewording the writing of somebody else. So, changing the odd adjective and using synonyms is not sufficient (but it can be when learning the English language).
* Think how you would explain the idea in a source to somebody who knows nothing about your subject or who is younger than you. This can help you to be clear about what the source is saying.
* If a paragraph in a source explains an idea, can you condense the idea to just one sentence?
* Ask a second person to read your work and check with them the meaning they extract from your writing to ensure that your paraphrasing has been successful in retaining and explaining meaning.
* Avoid using large chunks of the source text in your paraphrasing; this would be plagiarism.
* Ensure that you use citations to indicate where you have used the ideas derived from the thinking in another source.

### Examples of paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is something we all do most days. An everyday example would be from conversation.

#### Example 1 - a conversation

This conversation is one from the life of the author:

Mother, speaking to her son: “tell your sister it is really important that she is here at 2pm because that will give me enough time to be ready and for you to have been shopping, it is a Tuesday, so we need to leave you extra time, so 2pm works. If she arrives too late we won’t make it to the meeting.

Son, speaking to his sister: “Make sure you are here at 2pm, if not we will miss the meeting, mam says”.

In conversation we often don’t fully repeat the content of what another person said. In the case of the conversation above, I, the son selected the important elements from my mother’s words. My sister could not be late as we would miss the appointment. The other information could be useful in other circumstances, but I did not need it to convey the meaning to her.

In this case paraphrasing is reducing the content to its essential meaning to suit the purpose of my communication; making sure we arrived on time for the meeting.

#### Example 2 - paraphrasing from an everyday source

In everyday life many of us will hear or read the news, a magazine, a TV programme, or something on the radio and then paraphrase the contents in a later conversation or communication with somebody.

**Here is an extract of a news article from the ‘Made up Times’, published on the 20th July 2021.**

‘It is clear from the official statistics that this year has seen a remarkable increase in the number of rabbits living in the underground system in London. The latest census suggests 100,000 of our furry friends are surviving on litter and other rubbish left by passengers in trains and on platforms. Professor Andrew Knowall, from the University of Consett stated ‘it is remarkable that their eyes are starting to evolve to be twice the size of a standard rabbit’s, indeed, they can see in just 1/1000th of the light of a candle’.

**Imagine that Laura, a builder from Wrexham, read this and later that day said to her flatmate:**

“It’s like I always said, you should not leave litter hanging around, it feeds creatures. That’s why there are 100,000 rabbits on the tube now. Imagine, there must be rabbit droppings everywhere. Thank god that Wrexham does not have a tube system”

In this paraphrasing, Laura has taken elements of the facts and ideas from the original source and incorporated them into her own thinking. She has linked to her intellectual framework (like I always said) and extrapolated from the facts given to imagine consequences (droppings everywhere). This type of paraphrasing is closer to that expected in academic writing due to the fact the information in the source is used as part of the person’s overall argument.

#### Example 3 - Academic Paraphrasing

Here is an example of academic paraphrasing. You can see that this is considerably different to that used in everyday life due to the need to use citations and to be particularly precise in the meaning extracted from the original source. This example is imaginary to illustrate the point.

**Original source: Spencer, S. (2020) ‘Pies as a symbol of northern culture in the 21st Century’, *International journal of food and cultural identity,* 33:3 pp.123-128.**

‘As recognised above, the emergence of the pie as an integral element of football culture in the latter half of the twentieth century aligned with an identity that can be described as ‘rough and ready’ (Roberts, 1987, p123) in northern communities in which the principal employment was heavy industry. The analysis of language used to describe pies in the menus of gastropubs that occupy sites in former industrial zones contains clear links to this heritage (Brown, 2018, pp. 128-30), drawing upon elements of ‘northerism’ to both promote sales and establish an identity for the establishments in question’

This source can be used in multiple ways. It clearly contains facts, assertions and relationships that a writer can use within their argument. Here is an example of paraphrasing the above, linking to one other source.

‘When considering if the use of language in relation to Gastropub menus, in relation to the question of class identity, it is interesting to note that in northern gastropubs, which by nature are frequented more by higher socioeconomic groups (Hill, 2019, p.138) use language to describe pies that derives from working class football culture (Spencer, 2020) indicating that as northern culture has changed with reference to income and consumption patterns, elements of ‘traditional’ industrial identity have transformed alongside to remain cornerstones of what it means to be ‘northern’.

What is apparent in the example above is that the writer has not simply attempted to paraphrase the information from the source using a ‘linguistic method’ (replacing words, finding synonyms etc), but instead has read the source, thought about it, and used it in a way that is integrated into the argument they are making. The source does say that pies gained an identity in an industrial culture and that language used to describe them in gastropubs links back to this. The source has been paraphrased by being reduced to essential content needed to integrate into the overall argument being made.

### In Summary

* Simple paraphrasing involves simply rewordording somebody else’s writing, by changing specific words, using synonyms and rearranging sentences. This is not academic paraphrasing.
* Quotes can be used, but you must have a really good reason, usually that your discipline demands they be used, or the wording you are quoting is very significant, to use them. They must be integrated into your writing.
* Academic paraphrasing involves reading, understanding and using ideas from source material in your writing. This is central to academic writing and is more demanding than simple paraphrasing.

### A task to improve your paraphrasing skills

For a recent piece of your academic writing, read it through and select areas where you have paraphrased or quoted.

In each case, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What approach did I take when quoting or paraphrasing?
2. Looking back at the original source, did you convey the meaning in your writing?
3. If you wrote it now, would you do it differently? Why?
4. What lessons can you take forward to your next piece of academic writing?

### Where next?

* Have a look at the rest of the: [Academic Writing: a practical guide](https://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/academic-writing/home)
* Have a look at the section on: [Academic Writing Style](https://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/academic-writing/general-writing#s-lg-box-wrapper-18324437)
* Have a look at the guidance given by your department on the writing style and conventions they like. This may be in a programme handbook, module handbook, VLE site, web pages, or elsewhere. If you cannot find it, ask your module staff, or academic supervisor.