

Paraphrasing is a technique often used in academic writing. It enables other people's work to be described without plagiarising. In fact, it is better to paraphrase more and to use direct quotation less. This is because a lot of quotation can make your text sound 'bitty' and lacking in flow. In addition, each subject has guidelines on how much quotation is permitted, which you need to find out.

Paraphrasing often includes summarising, and sometimes includes part of a quotation<sup>1</sup>. At times, most or all of a short phrase is changed so it is not a copy or near copy of the original text. At other times, a summary of connected points may be written. It depends on the detail needed to help you develop your response to an assignment. You will need to remember that your work must include discussion and examples, and maybe also evaluation and critical analysis, so be careful to avoid large chunks of paraphrasing and summarising. You must always provide an in-text citation when writing about others' work.

## Paraphrasing techniques and guidance on their usage

People who find paraphrasing easy are often unaware of how they do it. However, there are some identifiable techniques you can learn. Be warned that you must use a mix of these each time, or your text will be too like the original and be seen as plagiarism.

### a) Using synonyms

These are words/phrases that have the same/similar meaning to the original. You must NEVER use this technique by itself. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to make sure the word you choose is appropriate for the context.

**Example** – *original*: Beam and Wood (2011) discovered that the major factors...

*paraphrase*: Beam and Wood (2011) **found** that the **main influences**...

### b) Changing active verb phrases into the passive, or vice versa

Look at the example below and see how this changes the word order, which brings a much more dynamic change. Some synonyms have also been used, thereby combining techniques, as advised.

**Example** – *original*: Smith (2013) investigated revision techniques used by students.

*paraphrase*: Revision techniques **deployed** by students **were researched by** Smith (2013).

<sup>1</sup> Use our handout *Writing about others' work: using direct quotations* to see examples of how this is done.

## c) Changing word class

Word class refers to the type of word, such as noun, verb, adjective and adverb. Look at the following example.

**Example** – *original*: Perez (2010) observed students' focus in seminars.

*paraphrase*: **Observations made by** Perez (2010) **about** students' focus in seminars **show that they pay more attention when exams are imminent**.

Note that the verb **observed** has been changed into a noun and is now part of one long subject. I have had to add a verb as a subject alone is not a sentence. Some related text has also been added to complete the point. This example could be seen as a paraphrase and a summary as two points have been brought together. This is a great way of highlighting major points that are linked. The writer could now go on to discuss, critically evaluate and add examples.

## d) Synthesis

You are expected to bring in ideas, viewpoints and research from a range of different writers and text types. This is called synthesis as it brings a variety of separate items together in a new way. The given example is typical and could be used early in an essay to bring in opposing points of view, which would then be developed further.

**Example** – *handout writer's paraphrase from two texts*:

Williams (2005) asserts that single-sexed secondary schools enable girls to achieve greater academic success. Brookes (2006), however, maintains that mixed secondary education is better for all children as it enhances social development in preparation for adult life.

Note the signposting (connecting) word **however**, which has been used in the second sentence to indicate the next point will oppose or differ from the former. Connecting devices add to cohesion and thus keep the reader engaged<sup>2</sup>.

## Some points to remember

- Whenever you bring in others' ideas, research or statistics, you must include an in-text citation. All the examples here are referenced using APA.
- Never use the synonym technique by itself.
- Check how much direct quotation is allowed by your course.
- Have a good balance of using others' work, discussion and relevant examples at minimum, and check to see if you also need evaluation and/or critical analysis.
- Whatever your first language, it is **always** better to write in your own words, even if you make a few language errors, than it is to copy others' texts word for word.

<sup>2</sup> Use our handout *Better essays: signposting* to help you learn more about improving textual flow.