The Writing Lab

Paraphrasing Sources
Handout courtesy of Angela Gulick

What Is Paraphrasing?
Paraphrasing is a skill whereby a writer takes an original text (verbal or written) and **<u>rewrites</u>** it using his/her own words and sentence structures. A paraphrase should contain all of the ideas of the original but should **<u>look substantially different</u>** from the original. Paraphrasing is like the board game **Taboo**. This game's goal is to get your partner to say a particular word by offering clues. However, you are given a list of words you **<u>cannot</u>** use as clues. For example, if the answer was "basketball," you might not be able to use words like "game," "sport," "free throw," "dunk," or "hook shot." When paraphrasing, you need to 1) rewrite words and 2) restructure sentences. Here is an example:

Sample Text to Be Paraphrased
Opportunities are best for technical writers and those with training in a specialized field. Demand for technical writers with expertise in areas such as law, medicine, or economics is expected to increase by approximately 12% in the next 15 years.

Step One: Read the passage several times until you have a very clear understanding of it. Your end goal will be to restate this text in your own words, and you can't do that until you know what it means. Look up definitions of words or ask others for clarification if you don't fully understand the passage.

Step Two: Without looking at the passage, write down what you remember as best you can. You may forget and leave details out; these can be added in later. Try to use your own words when you do this step.

Step Three: Go back and compare the original to your paraphrase. With a pen or a highlighter, highlight all of the major words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) that appear in both the original and the paraphrase.

Step Four: Find ways to restate the words that appear in both the original and your paraphrase. Words like a, the, of, to and so on do not need to be changed. Technical terms and numbers for which there are no practical alternatives don't need to be changed but should be enclosed in "quotation marks" to indicate they are part of the original text if you use **<u>five or more</u>** of them in a row. To illustrate, I have put **[alternative words in brackets].**

> Opportunities **[experiences]** should be best **[optimal]** for technical writers **[professional communicators]** and those with training **[expertise]** in a specialized **[focused]** field **[career]**. Demand **[need]** for technical writers **[professional communicators]** with expertise **[proficiency]** in areas **[subjects]** such as law **[legal]**, medicine **[medical]**, or economics **[financial]** is expected **[anticipated]** to increase **[grow]** by nearly 12% in the next 15 years. **[no other way to express these specific numbers, so I will "quote" just this portion]**

Step Five: Restructuring Sentences: A true paraphrase is more than the original sentence with new words plopped in. You also can restructure/rearrange the order of the information.

Final Paraphrase: Professional communicators are often in high demand, and jobs are anticipated to be on the rise by nearly "12% in the next 15 years." This is especially true when professional communicators have additional experiences and proficiency in particular content areas, such as legal, medical, and financial subjects.