

The Writing Lab

Paraphrasing Sources

Handout courtesy of Angela Gulick

Paraphrases and summaries are remarkably similar. Both skills involve taking original information you found in an article or through an interview and “translating” that information into your own words and sentence structures. Here is the difference: a paraphrase translates **ALL** of the original ideas (think translating from one language to another). However, a summary translates only **THE MOST IMPORTANT IDEAS** (think of how a movie trailer shows you only the best parts of the movie)

Let’s begin by looking at paraphrases. Paraphrasing means to take an original quote (verbal or written) and **completely rewrite** it using your own words and sentence structures. A paraphrase should contain **all of the original ideas** of the quote but **none of the original words** (other than “glue” words such as a, an, the, of, with, and so on). When paraphrasing, you need to 1) rewrite words and 2) restructure sentences. There are three main reasons to paraphrase:

1. Paraphrase when you want to **show your reader that you completely understand the material** and aren’t just randomly cutting and pasting quotes together.
2. Paraphrase when you want to **explain a complex concept in easier-to-understand language** to a reader who may struggle with a more complicated direct quote.
3. Paraphrase when the original quote has a **number of grammatical, spelling, and usage errors** that would easily be noticed by your reader. You would have to do a whole lot of “correcting” (through the use of brackets to enclose any changes you made to the original quotation). It is better to rewrite the passage in your own words and avoid all those extra points of punctuation.

Step One: Read the passage several times until you have a very clear understanding of it.

Your goal is to restate a text in your own words, and you can’t do that until you know what the text means. There may also be individual terms that are challenging to paraphrase, such as statistics, proper nouns (people’s names/places), legal language, and technical jargon. Be sure this text is possible to paraphrase before going much further. Also note that in some cases, you may be able to paraphrase the bulk of the information but have to directly quote a small part for which there is no other logical way to state it.

Step Two: Write down what you remember without looking at the original passage.

After reading and re-reading the original, write down the ideas that you can easily recall; this step will help you identify the key ideas you want to include in your paraphrase. You may need to do this process more than once.

Step Three: Compare your paraphrase to the original text.

Use a pen or highlighter to highlight all of the major words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns) that appear in your original quotation and your paraphrase.

Right-click on a term and select “Synonyms” to get a list of alternative words for that concept.

You don’t have to worry about smaller “glue words” such as a, an, the, of, with, and, but, or, so, and so on. You can reuse those. Keep an eye out for any important concepts you may have left out of the paraphrase.

Step Four: Compare your paraphrase to the original text.

Again, words like a, the, of, to and so on do not need to be changed. Technical terms, proper nouns, 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. A good rule of thumb is to use quotation marks for any passage that is five or more words in a row from the original source. In comparing the two passages side by side in the example below, it is easier to see what words were repeated (**underlined and bolded**).

Original Quotation:	Paraphrase Attempt with Original Repeated Words <u>underlined</u> and Alternative Words [in brackets]:
<p>The vast majority of pet owners don't understand what their <u>pets</u> are saying. Your cat or dog may use simple <u>body language</u> to politely request that you give him some space. If you ignore him or misinterpret his signals, he is likely to progress to more pronounced warnings, like a <u>growl</u> or hiss, to get his message across. Yelling at or hitting pets will not help this situation as these <u>aggressive behaviors</u> will exacerbate the <u>situation</u>.</p>	<p>Most people who have household <u>pets</u> [furry friends] don't always read their <u>pets' body language</u> [companions' physical behaviors] accurately. Some pets want physical distance from their owners, but the owners don't understand this. When pets feel crowded by their owners, the animals might resort to aggressive behaviors such as barking, biting, scratching, and <u>growling</u> [snarling]. Those who care for their little friends need to be calm and patient and avoid agitating their pets with yelling and hitting because these <u>aggressive behaviors</u> [hostile choices] will only make the <u>situation</u> worse [further upset themselves as well as their pets].</p>

Step Four: Restate the words that appear in both the original and your paraphrase. Here is the final version with my complete signal phrase and my parenthetical citation because this article had pre-printed paragraph numbers on the document.

According to "Pet Misbehaving? It Might Be Your Fault," by the organization Hotdog on a Leash, most people who have small furry friends don't always read their companions' physical behaviors accurately. Some animals want physical distance from their owners, but the owners don't understand this. When these animals feel crowded by their owners, the animals might resort to aggressive behaviors such as barking, biting, scratching, and snarling. Owners need to understand that returning aggressive behaviors such as raising their voices and swatting their companions will most likely make the situation worse (par. 4).

1. I still need to include a signal phrase (author, article title) with a paraphrase.
2. I didn't use quotation marks because this isn't a quotation; it's a paraphrase.
3. I didn't put this into a block quotation format because again, this isn't a quotation.
4. I wrap up my paraphrase with a paragraph number (par. 4) because this was a website article where there were pre-printed paragraph numbers.