

#5) Paraphrasing and Summarizing

PARAPHRASE: Restate the author's ideas in your own words

When you write a paraphrase, you present information from a source in your own words. You must pay close attention to the meaning of the original passage. You will frequently include a paraphrase when you need to refer to another writer's work in the course of making your own original statements. Paraphrasing is also valuable in helping you avoid plagiarism.

Guidelines for Writing a Paraphrase

(Adapted from Carolyn Wisniewski's "Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism," p. 22, and from the Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers, 3rd ed., p. 564)

- Read through the passage several times, cover the text you are working with, and use your own words, phrasing, and sentence structure to restate the idea.
- Say what the source says and emphasize what the source emphasizes.
- Remember to use synonyms for individual words and to rearrange the sentence structure.
- Expect your paraphrase to be about as long as, and possibly longer than, the original passage.
- If you are paraphrasing a technical source, you might need to keep jargon and technical phrases in your paraphrase. However, try to use your own phrasing as often as possible.
- Use quotations only occasionally and only if using a certain synonym is awkward. QWC handout #4, "Integrating Quotations," offers helpful advice for quoting.
- Consider introducing the source before the paraphrased text. Then at the end of the paraphrase, give credit to your source by adding an appropriate citation. Provide a citation every time you paraphrase, even within the same paragraph. QWC handout #'s 13-17 provide advice for documenting in MLA, APA, and Chicago styles.
- Reread the passage to make sure that you have included all the necessary information, to double check that your language does not coincide with that of the original, and to make sure that your paraphrase does not distort the source's meanings.

Example 1: The opening sentence of Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*:

Original:

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Step one: using synonyms

Eighty-seven years before now, our ancestors founded in North America a new country, thought of in freedom and based on the principle that all people are born with the same rights (Lincoln).

Step two: restructuring the sentence

Our ancestors thought of freedom when they founded a new country in North America eighty-seven years ago. They based their thinking on the principle that all people are born with the same rights (Lincoln).

Example 2:

(Adapted from Carolyn Wisniewski's "Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism," p. 23-24)

Original:

In the United States, more underage youth drink alcohol than smoke tobacco or use illicit drugs. Excessive alcohol consumption leads to many adverse health and social consequences and results in approximately 4,500 deaths among underage youth each year. Recent studies have emphasized the contribution of alcohol marketing to underage drinking and have demonstrated that a substantial proportion of alcohol advertising appears in media for which the audience composition is youth oriented (i.e., composed disproportionately of persons aged 12-20 years).

From: Jernigan, D.H. and T.S. Naimi. "Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising on Radio – United States, June-August 2004." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. 1 Sept. 2006: 937-40. This excerpt is from p. 937.

Incorrect paraphrase:

In the U.S., more young people drink alcohol than smoke cigarettes or use illegal drugs. Extreme alcohol consumption causes many adverse health and social consequences and leads to about 4,500 deaths of underage drinkers each year. Recently, studies have emphasized the role of alcohol marketing in underage drinking and have shown that a major portion of alcohol advertising appears in media for which the audience is largely composed of persons aged 12-20 (Jernigan and Naimi 937).

The writer of the above passage follows the sentence structures of the original too closely. Though the writer correctly substitutes synonyms for some words of the original, the changes are largely superficial, so the paraphrase is an example of plagiarism.

Correct paraphrase:

Many scientists are concerned with the impact advertising has on underage youth. Jernigan and Naimi discuss a study that confirms such concerns, focusing particularly on radio advertisements. They note that in the U.S., more youth consume alcohol than smoke or use illegal substances. Consuming extreme amounts of alcohol can create negative social and health-related consequences, and indeed, excessive underage drinking is responsible for nearly 4,500 deaths annually. Emphasizing the relation between alcohol advertising and underage drinking, recent studies have shown that a major amount of alcohol marketing appears on media aimed toward youth-oriented audiences, defined as audiences that have a larger-than-average proportion of listeners between the ages of 12 and 20 (937).

SUMMARIZE: Shorten the original by restating the main points

A summary differs from a paraphrase in that a paraphrase is usually about the same length as the original while a summary is shorter than the original passage. In writing a summary, you shorten the original passage by picking out and restating the main points. A summary allows you to get down to the main ideas of the source, condensing them into a few important statements and removing most (if not all) repetition, quotes, or specific examples.

Guidelines for Writing a Summary

(Adapted from the Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers, 3rd ed., p. 568)

1. Identify the main points and condense them without losing the meaning of the material.
2. Use your own words to restate and condense the passage.
3. Keep your summary short.
4. Use verbs effectively to integrate summaries into your prose.
5. Avoid plagiarism. Make sure you are restating the main ideas in your own words. Don't use too many words directly from the original passage. **As with a paraphrase, you should always give an appropriate citation of the source.**

Example 1:

Original: From Barbara Graham, “The Future of Love: Kiss Romance Goodbye, It’s Time for the Real Thing” Adapted from A Sequence for Academic Writing (Longman), pp. 9, 13:

What’s most unusual about our culture is our feverish devotion to the belief that romantic love and marriage should be synonymous. Starting with George and Martha [Washington], continuing through Ozzie and Harriet right up to the present day, we have tirelessly tried to formalize, rationalize, legalize, legitimize, politicize and sanitize rapture. This may have something to do with our puritanical roots, as well as our tendency toward oversimplification. In any event, this attempt to satisfy all of our contradictory desires under the marital umbrella must be put in historical context in order to be properly understood.

“Personal intimacy is actually quite a new idea in human history and was never a part of the marriage ideal before the 20th century,” says John Welwood, a Northern California-based psychologist and author, most recently, of Love and Awakening. “Most couples throughout history managed to live together their whole lives without ever having a conversation about what was going on within or between them. As long as family and society prescribed the rules of marriage, individuals never had to develop any consciousness in this area.”

In short, marriage was designed to serve the economic and social needs of families, communities, and religious institutions, and had little or nothing to do with love. Nor was it expected to satisfy lust.

Summary:

In our society, we expect passionate love to lead to a happy, lifelong marriage. This idea—that emotional and physical intimacy is a part of marriage—is a relatively new and unique practice in human history. As Graham points out, prior to the 20th century, marriage was often a matter of economic and social necessity, unrelated to love (9).

Notice that this summary is much shorter than the original passage. The writer starts by finding the main ideas (highlighted in the original passage) and then restates those main ideas using his or her own words. In the process, the writer left out most of the examples and quoted material used in the original passage. Best of all, the writer has also used enough of his or her own wording to avoid plagiarism. The summary boils down the original to the essentials and shows the writer’s understanding of the original source. The summary also gives a citation for the source, always a required step!