

Paraphrasing

Figuring Out the Meaning of Difficult Passages

1. What are the meanings of unfamiliar words?
2. What is (are) the sentence kernels (subject/verb/object)?
3. How is the sentence kernel expanded?
4. Which parts give additional information concerning the subject, the verb, and the object of the verb?
5. What is the main idea of the sentence?

Note: Understanding the structure of a sentence makes it easier to put its ideas in your own words.

Five Paraphrasing Strategies

1. Using Synonyms:

Come up with a word from your own vocabulary that comes as close to the meaning of the original as possible.

Reread the original passage with the new word(s) in place. See if it makes sense. If it changes in meaning, come up with a new synonym.

Compare the dictionary definitions of the original word with your synonym. If the definitions do not correspond, come up with a new substitution.

2. Using Varied Sentence Patterns:

Change the pattern of the sentence without altering its meaning.

Example:

Original--Technology can cause a disaster.

Altered--A technological disaster is possible (author #). (still plagiarism)

Key Questions:

1. Does the altered sentence mean exactly the same as the original?
2. Is the meaning clear?
3. Does the altered sentence read smoothly?

3. Changing the order of ideas:

Use this technique if the sentence contains two or more kernels.

Example:

Original--Technology can improve the quality of life if we plan carefully for the future.

Altered--If we plan carefully for the future, technology can improve the quality of life (author #). (still plagiarism)

For more information, please see the 4th ed. *The Brief Handbook* pages 116 to 118 and 164-175.

You can also visit <http://kirsznermandell.wadsworth.com> for additional help.

<http://www.usca.edu/writingroom>

4. Breaking Long Sentences Into Shorter Ones:

Example:

Mental disorder is undoubtedly a serious problem in our society, and as a result, dozens of different psychotherapeutic procedures have been developed over the past few decades, but to date these procedures rarely lead to a complete cure, so psychologists continue to search for new theories concerning the origin of mental problems and to look for new techniques for eliminating the distress of mental patterns.

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5. Making Abstract Ideas More Concrete:

Example:

The creation of an overall design for a complete computer system is the responsibility of a systems analyst; whereas, the implementation of the design plan is often the duty of the computer programmer.

The systems analyst designs the entire computer system, and the computer programmer makes the proposed system work (author #). (close but still plagiarism—note sentence structure)

Before the computer programmer can make a system work, the systems analyst must design the proposed computer system (author #). (That should be okay. Of course, the specific wording will depend upon your intended meaning.)

Eight Paraphrase Pitfalls

1. Misreading the original
2. Including too much of the original
3. Leaving out important information
4. Adding your opinion
5. Summarizing rather than paraphrasing
6. Substituting inappropriate synonyms
7. Expanding or narrowing the meaning
8. Forgetting to document

Note: Never use one single strategy alone when paraphrasing. Rather, you must combine strategies to paraphrase material properly and avoid plagiarism.