



How to Paraphrase

Students often find it difficult to paraphrase in their papers, feeling that the original writer said it better than they ever could. Staring at a difficult paragraph can set off writer's block and frustration. Here are some methods to make paraphrasing easier.

Say it out loud.

You can't paraphrase it if you don't understand it. And you don't know you understand it unless you can explain it to someone. Imagine you have to explain the author's viewpoint to your sister. What would you say? Often if you transcribe this imaginary conversation, you've got a good paraphrase.

Paraphrase from your notes.

Instead of staring at the section of writing you want to paraphrase and trying to re-word it, take notes on the passage. Then write your paraphrase based on your notes.

Combine a quotation with a paraphrase.

You might find that some words or phrases the author uses are crucial to the passage you want to paraphrase. Your difficulty with the paraphrase might be that you really can't leave those words out. You may be able to put most of the passage in your own words, and just work in a few important words.

Many writers in the 1930s noted the lack of training of college writing instructors. Francis (1932) noted that standards were typically lower for those teaching freshmen, but this was not considered an introductory job. Those hired to teach beginning or remedial writers did not then move on to more stable and lucrative positions. Instead, Arnold exclaimed that those taking these lowly jobs were almost infected by despair, when they landed "...at the bottom of the heap, contaminating one another with their discouragement and rebellion." Other writers such as Dickson (1938) and Carr also described poor working conditions for beginning writing instructors.

In this paragraph, the writer summarizes the opinion of Francis, and sticks in part of a sentence that has a lot of emotional impact. This was the good part, so the writer quotes these words directly. But mostly, the writer is conveying information gathered from Francis and two other authors.

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