

Paraphrasing

In your own words

Introduction

What exactly is paraphrasing? It can seem a bit confusing at first. Paraphrasing is when you express another person's idea or output in your own words. It still requires a reference and is considered plagiarism if the original source is not referenced.

Why paraphrase?

You might wonder what the point of paraphrasing is then ? Why not just quote the text directly? Well, there are a few reasons:

- Paraphrasing allows you to incorporate a referenced text into your argument. You aren't totally dependant on the original writer to phrase things
- You can change some of the wording to better fit the argument you're trying to make, provided that the essential claim made by the statement is correct.
- It's a great way to demonstrate your understanding of the text to the marker.

Practice

We'll take a look at paraphrasing before you have a go yourself. Before we look at a full paraphrase, keep in mind that you cannot keep too much of the original text in your work unless you are making a direct citation. Otherwise, the plagiarism software might highlight areas of concern when you submit your work to the university

Original text

Take a moment to look at the text below:

Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final research paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes.

Lester, J. D. (1976). *Writing Research Papers*. New York: Blackwells, pp.46-47.

Starting the process

To successfully paraphrase, you should attempt to change more than a few words of the original text. Here, for example, if you just said 'students *often* overuse direct quotations in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final *academic* paper' then you would not really be changing enough to show that you have understood the *meaning* of the original text. We have to do more than this to effectively paraphrase.

~~Students frequently~~ **students often** overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the ~~final research~~ **final academic** paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes.

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Developing the paraphrase

Where the original text states '**students frequently overuse**', let's change that to '**students fail to limit**'. This helps to show that the meaning of the original text has been understood.

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Changing the words

‘We can replace **Research paper**’ with ‘**academic essay**’.

While the **precise percentage** has been indicated in the original text, this was not necessary in the paraphrase and ‘**acceptable level**’ was used instead.

The original ‘**while taking notes**’ has been reworded in the paraphrase to ‘**during note taking**’. This shows that the original meaning has been correctly interpreted.

Students fail to limit direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the ~~final research~~ **academic essay** paper. ~~Probably only about 10%~~ **an acceptable level** of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials ~~while taking notes~~ **during note taking**.

Lester, J. D. (1976) *Writing Research Papers*. New York: Blackwells, pp.46-47.

Using different phrases

So far we've made quite a few changes, and there are still quite a few more changes we can make. Instead of saying "**strive to limit... exact transcribing of source material**" we can write '**reword any research text**'. The meaning is the same, but the wording has been sufficiently changed. This is a good start, but we can do better. Good paraphrasing is not only about adding different words, we can also change the structure.

Students fail to limit direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the **academic essay** paper. **An acceptable level** of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should ~~strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials~~ **reword any research text during note taking**.

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Thinking about the sentences as well as the words

We'll change the sentence structure here; the original is a little long-winded. We'll also use some synonyms to paraphrase the original writing. You should also note that there may be some key subject specific words that you will not be able to change, in this case “ **note taking**” is an example of this although we can change word order, they have had to retain the key word as it is essential to the meaning of the text.

Students fail to limit direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the academic essay paper. An acceptable level of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should reword any research text during note taking.

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Restructuring the sentence

Students fail to limit direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the academic essay paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter.

Can be changed to:

In academic essays students often fail to keep quoted material down to an acceptable level.

Changing the position of the linking word

Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes.

Can be changed to:

The problem often originates during note taking, therefore, it is essential to reword any research material at this stage (Lester, 1976).

So now we've got:

Finally, remember, even if you are using your own words, the idea comes from the original source and you must reference it. You should be careful to ensure that you don't accidentally change the meaning of the original text. You should also avoid paraphrasing every section of your essay, try to emphasise *your* argument more and show how your paraphrase is relevant to your point and remember to evaluate it.

In academic essays students often fail to keep quoted material down to an acceptable level. The problem often originates during note taking, therefore, it is essential to reword any research material at this stage (Lester, 1976).

Lets look at our two versions side by side

Original text

Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final research paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes.

Lester, J. D. (1976). *Writing Research Papers*. New York: Blackwells, pp.46-47.

Paraphrase

In academic essays students often fail to keep quoted material down to an acceptable level. The problem often originates during note taking, therefore, it is essential to reword any research material at this stage (Lester, 1976).

We have completed a successful paraphrase by doing the following:

- Changing words
- Changing sentence structure by rearranging the word order, making one sentence into two and by using linking words
- Keeping key subject specific vocabulary
- Adding the reference at the end.

Let's give it a go

Now we are going to give this a try. Take a moment to read the excerpt below, taken from Stetter, M.E. (2013) 'Teaching Students about Plagiarism Using a Web-based Module', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 37(5), pp. 675-693:

"Perhaps the most widespread form of plagiarism is accidental plagiarism, in which students are unaware that they are plagiarising (Nadelson, 2007). Students copy text without paraphrasing or putting quotes around verbatim material either accidentally or because they do not understand that they must paraphrase and cite (Duggan, 2006). One often-seen example of accidental plagiarism, patchwork paraphrasing, occurs when students only substitute an occasional word in a sentence taken directly from the text they are reading (Cooper, 2007) instead of paraphrasing and citing."

(Stetter, 2013, p. 676)

Let's give it a go- the first sentences

There is quite a bit of text here, and we need to demonstrate a good understanding of the point being made.

Let's look at the first two sentences ; which option below you think is the best way to handle them?

- The content of the first sentence is irrelevant, remove it and focus on the second sentence.
- Condense both sentences together, they are both relevant.
- The second sentence isn't relevant, cut it and focus on the first sentence.

"Perhaps the most widespread form of plagiarism is accidental plagiarism, in which students are unaware that they are plagiarising. Students copy text without paraphrasing or putting quotes around verbatim material either accidentally or because they do not understand that they must paraphrase and cite. One often-seen example of accidental plagiarism, patchwork paraphrasing, occurs when students only substitute an occasional word in a sentence taken directly from the text they are reading instead of paraphrasing and citing" (Sletter, 2013, p.676).

Answer 1

- The content of the first sentence is irrelevant, remove it and focus on the second sentence.

This isn't quite right. The first sentence lets us know the definition of the term we're discussing here, so we shouldn't get rid of this sentence and its content entirely.

Answer 2

- Condense both sentences together, they are both relevant.

Exactly, both sentences have important information, both the definition of the term being discussed and an example of what that entails. Next we'll see how we can effectively paraphrase these two sentences.

Answer 3

- The second sentence isn't relevant, cut it and focus on the first sentence.

This isn't quite right, the second sentence gives us a practical example of what the term entails, so we shouldn't get rid of this sentence and its content entirely.

Paraphrasing- the first sentences

Answer 2 is the correct option; we should condense both sentences together as they both contain important information which we'll need to retain in the paraphrase.

In your own words – using different words

Excellent, now we have established that we can condense the first two sentences, we'll take a look at what they say and then reword them more concisely .

The two main points are; that **accidental plagiarism is the most common form of plagiarism** and students sometime do it because they are **unaware of the appropriate citation practices**. How can we say that in fewer words?

- Accidental plagiarism is the most common form, where students copy a text without paraphrasing and citing due to a lack of awareness of citation practice.
- Accidental plagiarism is the most common form of plagiarism but no less severe for that commonality.
- Copying a text without citation is still plagiarism, even if carried out accidentally.

“Perhaps the most widespread form of plagiarism is accidental plagiarism, in which students are unaware that they are plagiarising. Students copy text without paraphrasing or putting quotes around verbatim material either accidentally or because they do not understand that they must paraphrase and cite. One often-seen example of accidental plagiarism, patchwork paraphrasing, occurs when students only substitute an occasional word in a sentence taken directly from the text they are reading instead of paraphrasing and citing” (Sletter, 2013, p.676).

Answer 4

- Accidental plagiarism is the most common form, where students copy a text without paraphrasing and citing due to a lack of awareness of citation practice.

Yes, that is correct, that covers both of the points made by the original text. Well done, we'll look at

the final sentence next.

Answer 5

- Accidental plagiarism is the most common form of plagiarism but no less severe for that commonality.

That's a good try, but only covers the first point made by the original text.

Answer 6

- Copying a text without citation is still plagiarism, even if carried out accidentally.

That's a good try but it only covers the second point made by the original text.

Paraphrasing- using different words

Answer 4 is the best option here as it covers both points made in the original text. When paraphrasing it is key that the original meaning of the text is retained.

So far we've been able to make some changes to the first part of the text.

“Perhaps the most widespread form of plagiarism is accidental plagiarism, in which students are unaware that they are plagiarising. Students copy text without paraphrasing or putting quotes around verbatim material either accidentally or because they do not understand that they must paraphrase and cite. One often-seen example of accidental plagiarism, patchwork paraphrasing, occurs when students only substitute an occasional word in a sentence taken directly from the text they are reading instead of paraphrasing and citing” (Sletter, 2013, p.676).

Accidental plagiarism is the most common form, where students copy a text without paraphrasing and citing due to a lack of awareness of citation practice (Stetter, 2013, p. 676). “One often-seen example of accidental plagiarism, patchwork paraphrasing, occurs when students only substitute an occasional word in a sentence taken directly from the text they are reading instead of paraphrasing and citing”(Sletter, 2013, p.676).

In your own words- the final sentence

Now we need to think about the final sentence and the meaning of it. We won't get very far if we aren't clear about exactly what the text is saying. So let's take a closer look. What do you think is the key meaning of the final sentence?

- Patchwork paraphrasing is a common form of accidental plagiarism.
- Patchwork paraphrasing is when only a few words are changed and the text is not cited.
- Patchwork paraphrasing is common. It is when only a few words from a source text are changed and that text isn't cited.

Accidental plagiarism is the most common form, where students copy a text without paraphrasing and citing due to a lack of awareness of citation practice (Stetter, 2013, p. 676). "One often-seen example of accidental plagiarism, patchwork paraphrasing, occurs when students only substitute an occasional word in a sentence taken directly from the text they are reading instead of paraphrasing and citing" (Stetter, 2013, p.676).

Answer 7

- Patchwork paraphrasing is a common form of accidental plagiarism.

This is part of the meaning here, but not all of it, have another go.

Answer 8

- Patchwork paraphrasing is when only a few words are changed and the text is not cited.

This is part of the message but not all of it. Have another go.

Answer 9

- Patchwork paraphrasing is common. It is when only a few words from a source text are changed and that text isn't cited.

Perfect, this covers both of the points made by the original text. Well done, we will do a final review and then we are finished!

Paraphrasing- the final sentence

Answer 9 is the best answer as it covers both the points made, when we understand the meaning of the sentence it means we can more effectively paraphrase it.

In your own words- effective paraphrasing

This is really coming along!

Now let's take another look at the final sentence.

The basic message is that patchwork

paraphrasing is a common form of accidental plagiarism and is when students change the odd word to disguise what would be a straight lift from the source text. Which of the following three sentences below paraphrases this idea most effectively?

- Patchwork paraphrasing is when only a few words are changed from the original source text.
- There are different forms of accidental plagiarism, one of the most common being patchwork plagiarism.
- An example of this is patchwork plagiarism, when a writer only changes a few words from an original source text and omits a citation.

Accidental plagiarism is the most common form, where students copy a text without paraphrasing and citing due to a lack of awareness of citation practice (Stetter, 2013, p. 676). "One often-seen example of accidental plagiarism, patchwork paraphrasing, occurs when students only substitute an occasional word in a sentence taken directly from the text they are reading instead of paraphrasing and citing" (Stetter, 2013, p.676).

Answer 10

- Patchwork paraphrasing is when only a few words are changed from the original source text.

Almost, this only covers the definition of the term, not the fact that it is one of the most common forms of accidental plagiarism.

Answer 11

- There are different forms of accidental plagiarism, one of the most common being patchwork plagiarism.

Almost, this only covers the fact that patchwork paraphrasing is a common form of accidental plagiarism.

Answer 12

- An example of this is patchwork plagiarism, when a writer only changes a few words from an original source text and omits a citation.

Perfect- this is the correct answer as it covers both points made by the original text.

Paraphrasing – effective paraphrasing

Answer 12 is the best option because the main idea from the original text has been reworded effectively. The writer has captured the main point but used sufficiently different language and sentence structure to convey this.

The final version

Accidental plagiarism is the most common form, where students copy a text without paraphrasing and citing due to a lack of awareness of citation practice (Stetter, 2013, p. 676). An example of this is patchwork plagiarism, when a writer only changes a few words from an original source text and omits a citation (Stetter, 2013, p. 676).

Don't forget that you need to cite this and add it to your bibliography, no exceptions!

Further advice

By now you hopefully have a good understanding of how to paraphrase effectively. This is a very important skill for academic writing! If at any point you feel you need a few more pointers, you should contact the Academic Skills Team for a drop-in session and we'd be happy to help.

Contact us at

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