



THE SALVATION ARMY
BOOTH
COLLEGE

Guidelines for Summarising & Paraphrasing

Summarising and paraphrasing require important thinking and writing skills which are crucial for success in any type of study. In your assignments the lecturers expect more than copied (plagiarised) pages from the text books and journals. They expect you to demonstrate an understanding of the major ideas/concepts and important issues in the discipline. By paraphrasing and summarising you can develop and demonstrate your understanding and interpretation of a text.

These two forms of writing are powerful tools for reshaping information to suit the many writing tasks you will be required to do throughout your studies.

Summarising is a useful skill for:

- Notemaking for reading
- Notetaking in lectures
- Writing an abstract/synopsis
- Writing the summary section of reviews
- Writing annotated bibliographies
- Incorporating reading material in reflective journals
- Speaking in seminars and tutorials
- Exam preparation

Paraphrasing is a particularly useful skill for:

- Notemaking from reading
- Notetaking in lectures
- Integrating evidence/sources in essays, journals, research reports
- Explaining information in tables, charts and diagrams
- Exam preparation

Summarising

Summarising is a spoken or written account of an event, text, section of text, or visual, in which the main idea is given, but details, examples and formalities are left out. Summarising is used with longer texts and primarily aims to reduce or condense a text to its most important ideas. Compare the following text and its summary

ORIGINAL TEXT

From Peters, P. (1985). Strategies for student writers: A guide to writing essays, tutorial papers, exam papers and reports. Queensland: John Wiley & Sons. p. 88 .

"The evaluative connotations of words are of considerable importance as you develop an argument or put forth an interpretation of some facts. Just a few are enough to signal your perspective in an otherwise neutral presentation of data. By introducing someone's proposition with the work "claim" or "assert", you imply a real possibility of challenging it and invite the reader to reserve judgement about it, if not to view it sceptically (such words are unfortunate if you really mean to endorse the proposition). But appropriately used they prepare the reader for your counter arguments long before you get to them. By describing a set of predictions in passing as either "optimistic" or "gloomy", you can very simply indicate both your criticism of them and the direction in which you think they err. The connotations of words can provide an interim commentary in a discussion before you communicate the ultimate evaluation or argument."

EXAMPLE SUMMARY

According to Peters (1985, p.88) words not only carry meaning but they also carry a positive or negative tone. She also explains how this aspect can be exploited by the writer to signal a judgement or opinion about the data or source material. It can also assist in laying the ground work for the up coming arguments by acting as a preliminary discussion.

ANALYSIS OF EXAMPLE SUMMARY

In the first sentence the source and main idea of the original text has been restated. The second sentence simplifies the original second and third sentence by omitting the examples and detailed explanations. While the last three sentences of the original text have been condensed by leaving out examples and simplifying detailed explanations, an important point is retained in the final sentence. The writer has used a variety of synonymous words and phrases to keep the original meaning (evaluative connotation = a positive or negative tone) and to accurately reflect the relationships between ideas (not only... but also, also ...).

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing presents a spoken, written or visual text, keeping the same meaning, but using different words. Paraphrasing is used with short sections of text such as phrases and sentences and may result in a longer, rather than shorter, version of the original. It offers an alternative to using direct quotations and assists greatly with incorporating source material in your assignments. Compare the following text and its paraphrase.

ORIGINAL TEXT

From Peters, P. (1985). Strategies for student writers: A guide to writing essays, tutorial papers, exam papers and reports. Queensland: John Wiley & Sons. P.85.

"In the act of composing, our search for words is mostly for those that can accurately represent the elements of our message and communicate them reliably to the reader."

EXAMPLE PARAPHRASE

Peters (1985, p.85) explains that writers are constantly trying to find the most appropriate vocabulary which will successfully transmit their ideas to their audience.

ANALYSIS OF EXAMPLE PARAPHRASE

It includes the source of the information and is about the same length as the original the use of synonymous words and phrases are used to retain the original meaning; 'in the act of composing, our search' = 'writers are constantly trying to find' and 'communicate them reliably' = 'successfully transmit'. Can you find other synonymous words or phrases?

Avoiding Plagiarism

If you are going to include a summary or paraphrase in an assignment there are two ways to ensure you do not plagiarise or misinterpret the original text:

1. Remember to acknowledge the source as you are presenting another author's idea.
2. Do not rely on just changing one or two words as the text will result in an inaccurate plagiarised version. Moreover such a narrow approach to your thinking and writing will guarantee little development or demonstration of your understanding of the information.

ORIGINAL TEXT

From Peters, P. (1985). Strategies for student writers: A guide to writing essays, tutorial papers, exam papers and reports. Queensland: John Wiley & Sons. p.88.

"The connotations of a word are aspects of its meaning that are implied in its use (as distinct from the word's core meaning. This is its denotation, what it denotes, or refers to)."

AN EXAMPLE OF AN INCORRECT PLAGIARISED PARAPHRASE:

The connotations of a lexical item are views of its meaning that are suggested in its use, and is different from its central meaning. This is called denotation, what it describes, or indicates.

ANALYSIS OF INCORRECT PLAGIARISED PARAPHRASE:

There are a number of problems with this paraphrase: The sentence structure is virtually identical, the synonymous words are not appropriate and result in an unclear statement and there is no reference acknowledging the source of information. Perhaps because the original text is rather abstract, a better paraphrase would be longer so as to include a more detailed explanation of the concept 'connotation'.

How to Summarise and Paraphrase

Before you can summarise or paraphrase you must decide which text or section of text you will use in your assignments. By following these 10 points and practising the advice, you will increase your understanding of a written text and be able to write a good summary or paraphrase.

1. Identify the purpose of the summary/paraphrase: Is it for your notes, for a critical review, to include as evidence supporting your understanding of a topic?
2. Read the original carefully. Check the meanings of words you are unfamiliar with. Read the text at least twice or till you are certain you understand it.
3. Select the important ideals and information by highlighting the original or taking separate notes. Select important definitions of key terms that you may need to include.
4. Select the main claim/thesis of the text to be summarised! paraphrased. Even if this is not explicitly expressed, try to write your own understanding of the author's claim.

5. Gather groups of details, examples and minor ideas under more general terms, a phrase or single word.
6. Do not include repeated ideas/information from the original.
7. Include the attitude of the author. Is s/he critical, praising, certain, uncertain?
8. After writing a summary or paraphrase check that the meaning and attitude of the original text is unaltered.
9. Use quotation marks (" ") for unique/specialist phrases that you have retained from the original.
10. Always keep accurate bibliographical details for in-text references/footnotes and your Bibliography/Reference list.

Some Essential Language Skills

The following language aspects are presented separately for clarity and demonstration purposes. However; the key to writing an accurate, non-plagiarised summary or paraphrase lies in manipulating all the grammatical resources so that while the text is still acknowledged as essentially another's meaning, it truly is - in your own words.

USING SYNONYMS

Synonyms are words or expressions which have a similar meaning in a particular context. The following word pairs are usually synonymous:

* professional/high standard

* assignment/submitted work

* expect/anticipate

* independent/self-reliant

Used in isolation this technique is very limited and can result in confusing sentences. Remember that words can have multiple meanings and positive or negative connotations. It is essential to always check your synonyms in a good English dictionary and consider the context of the ideas you are summarising or paraphrasing.

CHANGING THE VOICE

The 'voice' of a sentence can be 'active' or 'passive'. Active sentences allow the focus to be placed on who/what is making things happen. Passive sentences allow the focus to be on who/what is affected by the event/process.

Question: What is different about these two sentences?

Sentence 1 - Active Sentence: The lecturers expect students to demonstrate a professional approach in their assignments.

Sentence 2 - Passive Sentence: Students are expected to demonstrate a professional approach in their assignments.

Answers:

- * The order of information has changed. (The Object in the first sentence [students] becomes the Subject in the second).
- * The verb form has changed from active to passive ('expect' becomes 'are expected').
- * The subject of the active sentence [the lecturers] is not mentioned in the passive sentence.

In some sentences it is not possible to change from active to passive voice because of the structure of the word groups or phrases. It may also not be possible to change from passive to active if who/what is making/made things happen is unknown.

Question: *For you to try:* How would you rewrite *sentence 1*?

Answer: A professional approach in assignments

CHANGING THE WORD FORM

Many words have more than one grammatical form such as; noun, adjective, verb or adverb (expectation, expectant, expect, expectantly). Changing the word form is not as simple as it appears because by selecting a different grammatical form of a word, other changes occur. A thorough understanding of phrase and clause structures is required as the sentence structure will be different depending on the word form chosen. Furthermore, you need to check the words in a good dictionary because the meaning and spelling of the word may also change.

Question: Compare the following sentence to *Sentence 1*:

Sentence 3: The expectations of lecturers include that students demonstrate a professional approach in the assignments.

PACKING/UNPACKING WORD GROUPS

Often one word is inadequate to describe a thing, process, or circumstance. However English grammar allows us to combine words into groups so that one idea is more precisely expressed. In sentence 4 the groups are in brackets.

Sentence 4: [By demonstrating a professional approach in assignments], students [will meet] [their lecturer's expectations].

Compare sentence 1 and sentence 4. The simple word groups 'lecturers', 'expect' and 'students' have been packed into a larger group 'their lecturer's expectations'.

Sentence 5: Lecturers anticipate that students will ensure their submitted work is of a high standard, adopts recognised conventions, answers the question and is free of spelling and grammatical errors.

In sentence 5 the term professional approach has been expanded and defined.

Being able to combine words into groups or 'unpack' their meaning into simpler terms is a valuable skill for summarising and paraphrasing. It requires a good understanding of how grammar relates ideas to other ideas. This ability to manipulate vocabulary and grammar can also assist in reading comprehension.

Recommended Reading

These resources have additional advice and practice exercises in summarising and paraphrasing, and English grammar.

- Arnaudet, M. & Barrett, M. (1984). Approaches to academic reading and writing. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Currie, P. & Cray, E. (1987). Strictly academic: A reading and writing text. New York: Newbury House.
- McEvedy, M. & Wyatt, P. (1990). Assignment writing; Developing communication skills. Australia: Nelson.
- Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1991). Writing academic English. 2nd Ed. New York: Addison Wesley.
- Purdue University (1995). Practice exercises in paraphrasing. Purdue University On-Line Writing Lab [Online]. Available Netscape: <http://owl.trc.purdue.edu/>
- University of Birmingham. (1990). Collins cobuild: English grammar. London: Collins.