

Paraphrasing

What is paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is taking a sentence from an article or reading and rewriting it in your own words while keeping the original meaning.

Why paraphrase?

Paraphrasing is a skill you will need for your college work. In college classes, you will be asked to write summaries, responses to readings and research papers. When you do these assignments, you will need to borrow ideas, information and sentences from books, magazines and web sites. (These are called sources.) When you borrow sentences, you will need to paraphrase them. (You can also use quotations in your college papers, but we won't be practicing that in this class.) Paraphrasing is also a skill you can use at work and in your daily life.

What is plagiarism?

If you borrow information, ideas, sentences or anything from a source without stating the original author and source, it is plagiarism. If you copy a sentence and don't put quotation marks around it or paraphrase it, it is plagiarism. Plagiarism is copying or cheating. Plagiarism is a very bad word in the U.S. academic world. If you plagiarize, you will fail the assignment and may fail the class. This is another very good reason to learn how to paraphrase! Paraphrasing is not easy. It takes practice, practice, practice and patience.

What are the steps in paraphrasing?

- Read the original several times and make sure you clearly understand it.
- Think about what the writer is really saying and what she/he really means.
- Write the sentence in your own words.
- Add the authors name in an introductory phrase.

How do I change a sentence into my own words?

- Use synonyms
- Change word form or part of speech
- Change the word order
- Change the grammatical structure
- Use at least two of these techniques in your paraphrase. One is not enough.

What changes do you see in the following paraphrases?

Original:

“I experienced a deeply spiritual epiphany when I entered the majestic cathedral of a redwood forest.” (written by Julia Butterfly Hill)

Paraphrase:

Hill tells us that when she walked into a magnificent and sacred forest of redwoods, she had the experience of being spiritually moved.

Explain the changes:

Original:

“She says Chinese people are becoming ever more aware of the environment, and believes that education is an important first step towards change.” (written by Vivian Tseng)

Paraphrase:

According to Tseng, actress Gong Li believes that Chinese people are getting a greater awareness about the environment and the primary way to promote change is through education.

Explain the changes:

You can paraphrase parts of sentences or combine sentences.

Original:

“I ended up living in it for 738 days without ever once touching the ground...I saw intimately how interconnected all of life truly is and how everything we do affects this beautiful planet and us, the people and animals who call it home.” (written by Julia Butterfly Hill)

Paraphrase:

Hill says that she felt the interconnections of life and how our actions affect this wonderful world when she lived in a redwood tree for over two years.

Explain the changes:

Be careful not to paraphrase too literally.

Original:

“How glorious a greeting the sun gives the mountains!” (written by John Muir)

Not a good paraphrase:

Muir exclaims that the sun says hello to the mountains.

Using introductory phrases

Notice each paraphrase above has an introductory phrase which includes the author’s last name.

Hill tells us...

Hill says that...

According to Tseng, actress Gong Li...

(useful when author is talking about someone else)

The following introductory verbs have different meanings: *states, claims, asserts, insists, argues, concludes, concedes, proposes, reminds us, asks*. Try to use a verb that accurately shows the author’s position or feeling.

You can also use the introductory phrase to express your opinion: *I agree with John Muir when he states that...*

Good Paraphrase Checklist

- You used your own words and did not copy.
- The meaning is the same as the original.
- It is clear and grammatically correct.
- It has an introductory phrase which gives the author’s last name.

Now it’s your turn.

Read, understand and paraphrase the original sentences below taken from the “Wangari Maathai” article by Firtuna Asrat in this reader.

“Dozens of international organizations have honored Maathai for her efforts to protect the environment and improve the lives of the poor in Africa.” (paragraph 8)

“After establishing the tree-planting program, Maathai turned to other aspects of Kenyan society. She challenged the government to improve education, food distribution, and other areas of concern to women.” (paragraph 6) (Paraphrase in one sentence.)
