

Chapter 32

Paraphrase

A paraphrase is a kind of summary. A paraphrase restates a passage in your own words. In one sense, it is a summary because you are “translating” technical or complicated material into your own vocabulary. In another, however, it is not a summary, because it is usually the same length, or nearly the same length, as the original. [A summary that is shorter than the original passage is called a précis or synopsis. See the Glossary and chapters 33 and 39 for comparison.]

You may be asked to paraphrase passages to show you have read and understood them. You may be asked to paraphrase scientific results as part of a research project. You may write paraphrases for your own benefit, to clarify complicated passages. Whatever the reason for writing them, paraphrases provide a means of simplifying complicated, technical passages.

CHARACTERISTICS

A paraphrase usually

- reflects the paraphraser’s own vocabulary,
- reduces the original only slightly, usually by less than one-fourth,
- displays careful reading of the original,
- represents the original idea accurately and completely, without reflecting personal bias,
- uses clear, effective sentences as well as good mechanics, usage, and grammar.

PROCESS

To write a paraphrase, use the following procedure.

STEP 1: Prewriting—Reading the Material

Read the original passage several times to be sure you understand its meaning.

Next, before you begin writing, jot down the main ideas in the order in which they appear. Use only the key words or phrases, not sentences.

STEP 2: Writing—Drafting the First Summary

Once you have the material clearly in mind, put aside the original passage. Refer only to your list of main ideas, and write the summary in your own words. It is important to do so in order to avoid lifting whole phrases and sentences from the original. The temptation to plagiarize is the result of lazy thinking; by picking up an author's phrases and sentences, the paraphraser need not struggle to put the ideas into his or her own words. [See plagiarism in the Glossary.]

Beneath the obvious theft of plagiarism lies a deeper problem. Because the very purpose of the paraphrase is to simplify and reduce difficult passages, the ultimate futility of using the author's words should be self-evident.

STEP 3: Revising—Checking for Accurate Content

Once you have completed your paraphrase, reread the original and compare it with your version. Ask yourself these questions:

- Have I included all the important ideas? If I haven't, how can I best include them?
- Have I avoided all insignificant and unnecessary ideas?
- Have I accurately represented specifics and generalities? If not, what can I change to produce an objective paraphrase?
- Have I developed each idea the same relative length as in the original? If not, how can I best adjust the imbalance?
- Have I placed the same emphasis on each idea as in the original? If not, how can I resolve the difference?
- Have I used a simple, straightforward vocabulary?
- Have I used clear, effective sentence structure?
- Have I plagiarized? If so, how can I rephrase things?
- Make any additions, deletions, or changes necessary to maintain accuracy.

Be absolutely certain that you do not take phrases or sentences directly from the original. Read through the original passage again, line by line, comparing it with your paraphrase.

STEP 4: Proofreading—Correcting the Mechanics

Make sure that spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage, and mechanics are accurate. [See Part IV for rules and examples.] Check for accurate vocabulary.

Check the sentence structure. Have you used effective sentences? Have you varied their structure? Are they easy to read? Finally, check one more time that you have not committed any of the deadly sins of paraphrase writing. Be certain that you have not

- misrepresented or changed the emphasis of an idea from the original source, or
- relied too heavily on the wording of the original passage and allowed plagiarism to creep into your work.

Use the following sample paraphrase to test your understanding of the process and the expected result. An analysis of the sample follows.

Sample Paraphrase

The original passage that follows uses technical language to discuss the way in which we learn. The paraphrase simplifies this technical language and sentence structure. Note evidence of the preceding process steps.

Original Passage

Recent research has determined that humans tend to fall into one of four quadrants according to their learning styles. Quadrant one learners tend to be divergent thinkers and need personal and emotional involvement in order for learning to take place. As idea people, they function through social integration and strive to bring unity to diversity. Quadrant two learners are assimilators, needing systematic learning via a logical and intellectual approach. As analytic learners, they reflect on ideas to create concepts and models. Quadrant three learners tend to be convergent thinkers who are practical, problem-oriented people. Pragmatic decision makers, they restrict judgment to concrete things. Quadrant four learners are accommodators needing random patterns of learning. They aim to bring action to concepts and exercise authority through common vision, hesitating to make decisions affecting others.

Paraphrase

As learners, we fall into four groups. The first kind of learner needs to be caught up in an idea physically and personally. His personal involvement and concern for others make him seek harmony. He's emotional. The second kind of learner absorbs all the information around him, categorizes it, and reasons out the results. He will seek the data gathered to develop an ideal. He's systematic. The third kind of learner is opposite the first kind. He tends to be less emotional, more utilitarian. His thorough analysis results in a valid decision. He's practical. The fourth kind of learner needs numerous approaches to learning something new. As an opposite to the second kind of learner, he relies more on instinct than on logic. When decisions must be made, he doesn't like to interfere with others' lives. He's an accommodator.

ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE PARAPHRASE

Note the following characteristics of the sample paraphrase:

- The paraphrase presents the same ideas as the original passage and is nearly the same length.
- Its vocabulary is quite different from that of the original. This change marks its most important function: to reduce technical or complicated writing to simpler, easier-to-understand prose. For instance, the technical term *quadrant* is omitted, as are words such as *divergent*, *convergent*, *assimilators*, *analytic learners*, and *pragmatic*.
- Complicated ideas are presented in simple sentences to make them easier to understand. In the original passage, *quadrant one learner* is defined by means of a sentence with a compound predicate. In the paraphrase, *first kind of learner* is defined by a simple sentence.
- The paraphrase and the original are nearly the same length, though the original includes nine sentences to the paraphrase's fifteen since the sentences in the paraphrase are much shorter than those in the original.
- Words are shorter in the paraphrase. While words tend to be three syllables in the original, those in the paraphrase tend to two syllables.
- The paraphrase shows careful reading and thorough understanding of the original. No plagiarism has crept in.
- Sentence structure, mechanics, usage, and grammar are accurate.

Following these step-by-step procedures and heeding these suggestions should enable you to create an equally successful paraphrase.