



Paraphrasing

Teaching and Learning Unit Faculty of Economics and Commerce



What is Paraphrasing?

Paraphrasing is probably the most important thing that one learns to do at university—leaving aside the subject knowledge one acquires.

A *paraphrase* is an extract from another source re-written by another person—in this case, the student—with reference details provided. This is different from a quotation. A *quotation* is the *exact words* of someone else given in inverted commas with reference details provided.

If you quote too much you can be accused of poor writing. Anyone can copy! Quoting too much does not show your reader that you can write well or that you understand the material. On the other hand, if you copy without acknowledgement you are guilty of plagiarism (see **TLU Help Sheet: Plagiarism**). Therefore you need to paraphrase.

Techniques of Paraphrasing

There are a number of techniques to use when writing the same information in your own words. This Help Sheet will give examples of all of them. Here are some tips when using the techniques:

- Use as many strategies as you can *simultaneously*;
- Vary the strategies (don't use the same ones all the time);
- Practice the techniques often and regularly. It is not easy to paraphrase.

The ability to paraphrase well is the mark of a *good* writer so you should take the practice of paraphrasing seriously.

How to Paraphrase

There are five main ways to paraphrase and therefore to avoid plagiarism.

- Use Synonyms
- Use varied sentence patterns
- Change or reverse the order of ideas
- Break long sentences into short sentences
- Make abstract ideas more concrete (simplify)

1. Using Synonyms

- "Big in size" instead of "very large".
- "Tertiary institutions", instead of "universities".
- "approximately five hundred" instead of "It is estimated that no fewer than five hundred", and so on.

Use a good Thesaurus or Dictionary but pay attention to usage. Not all words that are synonyms are used in practice.

2. Vary the sentence Patterns

Original:

- Technology can cause disasters

Change to:

- Technological disasters are possible

Better:

- Technological misfortunes/accidents are possible

3. Change or reverse the order of ideas

- Technology can improve the quality of life if we plan carefully for the future
- If we plan carefully for the future, technology can improve the quality of life (still plagiarism)
- Carefully forward planning can ensure that technology will meet our future needs (*Better*).

4. Break long sentences into short sentences

- This model provides a microeconomic theoretic rationale for why researchers have failed to find consistent evidence of the superiority of one teaching technique over another in the

Created by: Dr Martin Davies
TLU
2nd Floor, Babel Building
The University of Melbourne

production of learning in economics. (Becker, 1997, p. 9). **One sentence**

Shortened version:

- This model provides a microeconomic theoretic rationale. It explains why researchers have failed to find consistent evidence. They have not found the superiority of one teaching technique over another. These techniques have not led to better production of learning in economics. (Becker, 1997, p. 9). (*Better but still plagiarism*)

Paraphrased version using synonyms:

- This framework has a clear basis in microeconomic theory. The explanation accounts for why people working in the area have not proven their initial assumption. Their assumption was that one pedagogical technique has clear advantages over the others. However, the evidence was not conclusive. It did not show that one pedagogical style led to a better understanding of economics (Becker, 1997, p. 9). (*Better.*)

Paraphrased version using synonyms with order of sentences reversed:

- The evidence did not show that one pedagogical style led to a better understanding of economics. The initial assumption was that one pedagogical technique has clear advantages over the others. However, the evidence was not conclusive. People working in the area have not proven their initial assumption. This framework has a clear basis in microeconomic theory (Becker, 1997, p. 9). (*Even better.*)

Note that while the aim of paraphrasing is to make someone else's idea or evidence your own (by re-writing it in your own words), you must always respect the fact that it is someone else's idea. You must therefore always provide a citation to the original source. Pretending someone else's idea is your own is plagiarism.

5. Make abstract ideas concrete

This method of paraphrasing involves making complex ideas simple or more concrete. To return to the original example:

- This model provides a microeconomic theoretic rationale for why researchers have failed to find consistent evidence of the superiority of one teaching technique over another in the production of learning in economics. (Becker,

1997, p. 9).

Simplified version:

- This accounts for why theorists working in the area found the following: a student that is taught with Method A is no better prepared than if he is taught with Method B. The evidence does not show that either A or B is better in terms of learning outcomes (Becker, 1997, p. 9).

Once again, a citation is given because the idea is not your own!

Citation Methods

We have seen that there are five main ways to paraphrase:

- Use Synonyms
- Use varied sentence patterns
- Change or reverse the order of ideas
- Break long sentences into short sentences
- Make abstract ideas more concrete (simplify).

While you can paraphrase effectively using these techniques, you also need to cite the source of your information.

To cite information, use a mixture of information prominent, author prominent and weak author methods (see **TLU Help Sheet; Quoting Information**).

Information prominent:

Research indicates that ... (Becker, 1997, p. 9) (**present tense**)

Weak Author Prominent:

Research has shown/Some have argued that/ ... (Becker, 1997, p. 9). (**present perfect tense**)

Author Prominent:

Becker (1997, p. 9) argues that ... (**present tense**).

Another way to cite information is to use "Critical Review Language" (See **TLU Helpsheet: Critical Review Language**) e.g., phrases like:

- According to Becker (1997, p. 9)
- In Becker's view ... (Becker, 1997, p. 9)
- Becker's point seems to be that ... (Becker, 1997, p. 9)

There are thousands of alternatives here!

A Word of Warning!

- Plagiarism is easily identified (especially in work by overseas students). Native speakers can easily recognise “perfect” English amongst “imperfect” English.
- Specialist lecturers will often know all the books/article in a particular area and can identify stolen passages easily (even the page number!)
- Students CAN be asked to leave the university if found guilty of plagiarism and degrees CAN be withheld or withdrawn.

Accuracy and Care

- Check and double check citation source for accuracy;
- Ensure paraphrased information *is true to the original*. You cannot paraphrase the information incorrectly. You must give the meaning intended by the writer;
- If ellipses (...) are used to truncate (shorten) source material, ensure that the shortened paraphrase is true to the original and that you have not left something important out or changed the meaning intended;
- Ensure that you *integrate quoted information into your text* by using critical review language and a mixture of author prominent, weak author, and information prominent citation methods.

Paraphrasing Exercises

Read the following passages carefully and write a paraphrase of each one. Suggested answers are given overleaf. (Examples are from *ELBC (Academic Communication Skills) Booklet*, Technical and Further Education, Adelaide.)

1. Lead has been known to be a poison for many centuries. In fact, there is evidence that it contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. There is no doubt that in the second century BC Rome's wealthy ruling class suffered from a disproportionately high level of stillbirths, sterility and brain damage. And a high lead content has been found in the bones of such ancient Romans. One widely-supported hypothesis is that the cause of both facts was lead poisoning from leaden wine-cups and plates which only the rich could afford (Williams 1982, p. 83).
2. In modern times, over 90% of atmospheric lead poisoning comes from car exhausts, as a result of the burning of leaded petrol. Lead poisoning is therefore a particularly serious threat in cities, especially to young children who live near busy city streets. But atmospheric lead pollution is even having a global effect (Williams, 1982, p. 83).
3. Demography is the study of the change in size, distribution and character of the human population; and the two most basic factors in demography are the birth-rate and the

death-rate. The former expresses the number of children born per thousand people per year. The latter indicates the number of people who die per thousand people per year. If we consider the Earth as a whole, we see that the population growth or decline is caused by the difference between the number of births and deaths over a given period. There are normally more births than deaths, and this is known as a natural increase in population (Williams, 1982, p. 97).

4. There have been many cases of countries adopting advanced technology in which the results proved disastrous in terms of employment and foreign exchange. For example, in one poor country, 5,000 shoemakers were kept very busy by their customers. Many other shoemakers earned their living by supplying material to the shoemakers: leather, handtools, cotton laces, wooden lasts, and cartons. The country then imported two plastic-injection moulding machines, costing over US \$60,000. All the PVC for making the shoes was also imported, which meant more spending outside the country. The plastic shoes were cheaper than the leather ones, and outlasted them, and so most of the 5,000 shoemakers soon found themselves out of a job. So did most of their suppliers. The plastic shoe factory, on the other hand, employed only about 40 people (Williams, 1982, p. 44).

Sample Paraphrase Answers

Of course there are many ways to paraphrase. Here are some ways you could have paraphrased the examples:

1. According to Williams (1982, p. 66) the ancient roman elite had a much higher incidence of mental retardation and child mortality than the rest of the roman population. They also had trouble producing children. One explanation for this was the fact that they ate and drank from utensils made of lead. Only the wealthy romans could afford such utensils. Lead was found in the bones of these people after skeletal remains were discovered in archaeological sites, and later analysed in laboratories. One can even speculate that lead might have been a factor in the decline in the roman civilisation. Of course, lead has been regarded as a toxic substance for many years but the roman elite would not have known this (Williams 1982, p. 83)..
2. The use of lead is damaging the environment, especially the atmosphere. It is contributing to global warming and other environmental problems. Cars produce nine times the lead emissions than the lead emitted from all other sources. The use of petroleum is the cause of this. The emission of lead is particularly dangerous in densely populated areas. This is because lead has an adverse effect on child development (Williams, 1982, p. 83).
1. The human population increases because there are more people being born than those that are dying over a defined period. The number of people being born annually out of a thousand people is known as the birth-rate. Conversely, the number of people who die annually out of a thousand people is known as the death-rate. Both of these measures show the character of the human population at a point in time. The subject which deals with the growth, spread and nature of the human population is the discipline of demography (Williams, 1982, p. 87).
2. The use of modern machinery is not necessarily beneficial for the economy of a society. Sometimes it can cause serious problems. The situation of a footwear company in a developing country is a case in point. Williams (1982, p. 44) outlines how more people were employed before the introduction of an expensive plastic shoe-making machine in one developing country than after its introduction. Before the machine was introduced, many people were engaged in providing component parts for the leather shoes such as laces and fabric. Work was available for thousands of people. However, once the machine was imported it effectively dispensed with the jobs of the suppliers. Many people became unemployed. The plastic shoes also outlasted the traditional leather shoes which meant that people purchased fewer shoes. This also had an effect on employment. Worse still, the machine and all its parts were sourced from overseas. This meant that the money was not spent in the developing country.

Sources:

ELBC (Academic Communication Skills) Booklet, Technical and Further Education, Adelaide.)

Weissberg Robert and Buker Suzanne, *Writing Up Research: Experimental Report Writing for Students of English*, Prentice Hall, (1990).