

# Paraphrasing and summarising

Writing information **in your own words** is a highly acceptable way to include the ideas of other people in your writing. There are two ways you can do this: paraphrasing and summarising. It is very important, however, to paraphrase and summarise correctly because there is a fine balance between *acceptable* and *unacceptable* paraphrasing and summarising (plagiarism). You need to learn the rules so you are able:

1. To paraphrase information
2. To summarise information

**NOTE:** APA referencing style is used in this fact sheet.

## 1. To paraphrase information

**To paraphrase** is to rewrite something using different words without changing the original meaning. This is what is usually meant by the phrase 'in your own words'. The paraphrase should be clearer and more easily understood than the original and is often **about the same length**. Paraphrases are a good alternative to using direct quotations.

In your writing, you may make a paraphrase of:

- short sections of text (e.g. phrases, sentences)
- longer sections of text (e.g. a paragraph)
- information that explains tables or figures.

### STEPS FOR PARAPHRASING

1. **Read** the text carefully. **Underline**, or note, any important subject-specific words.
2. Look up any difficult words, and try to find **synonyms** for them.
3. Try to find different ways of expressing the information in the **groups of words** (phrases).
4. **Rewrite** each sentence. Try to simplify the sentence structure and the vocabulary without changing the meaning.
5. **Put your text out of sight and write your paraphrase from memory.**
6. **Revise** what you have written, comparing it to the original. Your paraphrase should clarify the original, but be written clearly in your own words.
7. Do not forget to use an **in-text reference** at the start or end of your paraphrase.

### EXAMPLE OF CORRECTLY PARAPHRASED INFORMATION

ORIGINAL TEXT (45 words)	ACCEPTABLE PARAPHRASED TEXT (56 words)
Traditionally, in oral and written discourses, the masculine pronoun 'he' was used as a pronoun to refer to a person whose gender was unknown or irrelevant to the context. Recently, this usage has come under criticism for supporting gender-based stereotypes and is increasingly considered inappropriate (Smith, 2010, p. 24).	If the gender of a person was not known or was unimportant to the meaning of oral or written texts, it was customary to use the masculine form of 'he' when a pronoun was required; however, there has been growing concern about this practice in modern usage because it appears to privilege stereotypes based on gender (Smith, 2010, p. 24).

### ASSESS YOUR PARAPHRASE

- ✓ The MEANING is the same.
- ✓ Most of the words have been changed.
- ✓ The sentences have been significantly restructured.
- ✓ This is about the same length as the original writing
- ✓ The information is correctly referenced.

## 2. To summarise information

Many assignments are accompanied by a compulsory and/or suggested reading list. No doubt you have often wondered how your 2 000 or so word assignment could possibly incorporate all those resources that are meant to inform your writing. Summaries of material may be used to give an overview of the work of one or more authors, so they are **much shorter** than the original text. Because they are very brief outlines of arguments made, they are very useful when you want to indicate the support given for and/or against some position you are taking in your argument.

In your writing you may make a summary from:

- one or more paragraphs
- an entire article, chapter or complete work
- a combination of readings with similar ideas.

### STEPS FOR SUMMARISING

1. If you are reading longer texts (e.g. a chapter, a journal article), **skim read** the information. Note sub-headings, the first and last paragraphs and topic sentences.
2. **Read** the text carefully using a dictionary.
3. **Reread** a difficult text several times.
4. **Write notes** in point form using key words and ideas.
5. **Put your text away** and write your summary from your notes.
6. **Refer back to the original** to make sure that your summary truly reflects the writer's ideas and strength of opinion (degree of certainty on this topic).
7. Do not forget to use an **in-text reference** at the start or end of your summary.

### EXAMPLE OF CORRECTLY SUMMARISED INFORMATION

ORIGINAL TEXT (103 words)	ACCEPTABLE SUMMARISED TEXT (31 words)
"For most people, writing is an extremely difficult task if they are trying to grapple in their language with new ideas and new ways of looking at them. Sitting down to write can be an agonising experience, which doesn't necessarily get easier with the passage of time and the accumulation of experience. For this reason you need to reflect upon and analyse your own reactions to the task of writing. That is to say, the task will become more manageable if you learn how to cope with your own particular ways avoiding putting off the moment when you must put pen to paper" (Taylor 1989, p. 3).	Inexperienced and even skilled writers can feel a great deal of anguish when faced with writing tasks; however, this response can be managed by recognising and coping with personal avoidance strategies (Taylor, 1989, p. 3).

### ASSESS YOUR SUMMARY

- ✓ The MEANING is the same.
- ✓ The summary keeps the degree of certainty of the writer.
- ✓ This is a much shorter version of the original writing.
- ✓ The source/s of information is/are clearly referenced.

For more detailed information on paraphrasing and summarising, go to the Academic Skills website. Click on Academic skills online and select from the Academic skills online workshops:  
PARAPHRASING AUTHORS AND SUMMARISING AUTHORS.