Practising academic integrity: How to use paraphrases in your writing

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What is paraphrasing?
A paraphrase is where the meaning of a section of a source is put into your own words.

Paraphrases can be longer or shorter than the original source. Always reference paraphrases included in your writing.

It is important paraphrases used in your writing are referenced and:
- keep the meaning of the original source
- change the phrasing found in the original source (not just change a couple of words)
- use language relevant to your discipline.

Example paraphrase

Original
Oral health is essential to general health and quality of life. It is a state of being free from mouth and facial pain, oral and throat cancer, oral infection and sores, periodontal (gum) disease, tooth decay, tooth loss, and other diseases and disorders that limit an individual's capacity in biting, chewing, smiling, speaking, and psychosocial wellbeing.
A poor paraphrase

The World Health Organization (n.d.) insist oral health is important to general health, and well-being. Oral health is where the person is free from facial pain, oral infection, tooth decay, tooth loss, and other diseases that curtail one’s ability to bite, chew, smile and wellbeing.

This is a poor paraphrase because it keeps the same phrasing as the original and just changes a few words.

A better paraphrase

Poor oral health, including tooth loss, infection and facial pain, can seriously impact on health and well-being (WHO, n.d.).

This is a better paraphrase because the writer has put the meaning of the original source into their own words.

Why should I use paraphrases in assignments and exams?

Learning how to paraphrase is an important part of practising academic integrity, and is crucial to study success. This is because academic writing involves drawing upon existing knowledge about the topic, and ‘blending’ your words and ideas with those found in credible, relevant sources.

Using paraphrases is the most common way students include, or ‘blend’ ideas, information, data, and examples found in credible sources into their own writing at university.

There are two main reasons why paraphrases are used in assignments and exams:

1. Paraphrases demonstrate your understanding. By paraphrasing a source you show the marker that you understand the source well enough to put the idea or information into your own words.
2. Paraphrased material often flows well and adds coherency to your writing. The idea is to word the paraphrase so it matches the rest of the paragraph.

When should I use paraphrases in assignments and exams?

As a rule, you should paraphrase a source whenever you can. Only use direct quotations and summaries if you can’t paraphrase.

Direct quotations are used:

- if the wording or phrasing in the source is crucial to the point you are making (or your topic)
- when defining concepts.
Summaries are used:

- to provide an outline of the main points made in a source.

This means paraphrases are used every other time you want to blend ideas, information, data, or examples, with your own ideas and words.

How do I paraphrase sources?

Paraphrasing is a higher level academic writing skill. It is important your paraphrases are fair, and put the meaning of the original source in different words.

It is not OK to:

- just change a couple of words around and keep the original phrasing (wording)
- change the meaning of the original source to suit your assignment topic or argument

Practise helps to develop writing skills. Give yourself time to develop paraphrasing skills.

Four steps to writing paraphrases:

1. Carefully read the section you intend to paraphrase until you feel you understand its meaning
2. Cover the original source and jot down key words that capture the meaning of the section you want to paraphrase
3. Re-work the paraphrase until it is clearly worded, and makes sense in relation to the rest of the paragraph you are writing.
4. Double-check the paraphrase to make it fairly represents the meaning in the original source, and avoids using the same phrasing.

Tips for effective paraphrasing:

- Choose small sections to paraphrase while learning to write at university. Paraphrasing a sentence is much easier than paraphrasing a paragraph or page.
- Try to ignore the phrasing (or wording) of the original source, and focus on the meaning of the section you intend to paraphrase.
- Read and re-read the original source carefully until you feel confident you understand the meaning of section to be paraphrased.
- When you write the paraphrase always cover the original source so that you put the meaning of the source into your own words.
- DON’T just change a couple of words and keep the original phrasing (wording). At best, doing this is poor paraphrasing. At worst, if deliberate, this is a type of plagiarism.
- Always double check paraphrases fairly represent the meaning of the original source.
- Always acknowledge you are using others’ work when including paraphrases, by referencing consistently and correctly.
Related Quick Guides

Summarising and paraphrasing, Practising academic integrity: An introduction to blending paraphrases into your writing, Practising academic integrity: Reporting verbs, Practising academic integrity: An introduction to referencing