

How to use paraphrases in your writing

Paraphrasing correctly is one way students **practise academic integrity** in their assessments. This guide offers an introduction and practical tips.

What is paraphrasing?

A **paraphrase** is where the **meaning** of a source is put into your own words. The paraphrase can be longer or shorter than the original source.

It is important that **paraphrases used in your writing are referenced and:**

- keep the meaning of the original source
- change the phrasing in the original source (not just change a few words)
- use language relevant to your discipline (keep disciplinary concepts or specialist terms).

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 experience 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 severely impact on health and wellbeing (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 assessments and exams?

Writing assessments at university involves drawing upon existing knowledge about the topic, and 'blending' your words and ideas with those found in credible, relevant sources. Paraphrases are the most common way to do this.

Students mainly use paraphrases to include sources in their writing because this:

1. **demonstrates their understanding to the marker.** 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. **adds flow and coherency** to their writing. The idea is to word the paraphrase so it matches the rest of the paragraph.

When should I use paraphrases in assessments 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 (e.g. you want to agree or disagree with the **wording** of the claim)
- when defining concepts (e.g. to provide an exact statement of the nature and limits of the concept using a disciplinary expert)
- if the quote itself is famous in your field/topic.

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, arguments, theories, information, data, or examples, with your own ideas and words.

How do I paraphrase sources?

It is important that your paraphrases are **fair**, and **put the meaning** of the original source into **different words**.

It is not OK to:

- just change a few words around and keep the original phrasing (wording)
- change the meaning of the original source to suit your argument.

Paraphrasing is a higher level academic skill and takes time and practice to develop.

Five 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. Draft and 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 sure it **fairly represents the meaning** in the original source, and **avoids using the same phrasing**.
5. Reference your paraphrase using the set referencing style guide.

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 paraphrase sources when making notes. The more you paraphrase the better you will get at it.
- Expect paraphrasing to be a **process of writing and re-writing**.
- Don't put an impossible demand upon yourself to make your paraphrase as 'beautifully' worded as the professionally edited original source. As a student writer, it is your job to put the meaning of the source into your own words and reference.
- Read and re-read the original source carefully multiple times until you feel confident you understand the **meaning** of the section to be paraphrased.
- **DO** keep disciplinary concepts or relevant specialist terms.

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