

Summarising and paraphrasing

At university it is really important that you can *summarise* and *paraphrase* information. First, what do these two words mean?

When you summarise something, you state the same ideas only in fewer words. It is OK to use some, but not too many, of the original words in a summary. A summary must be shorter than the original.

When you paraphrase something, you express the same ideas but in different words. A paraphrase is usually, but not necessarily, shorter than the original. In assessments paraphrasing is a good way to avoid quoting too much and show that you understand the original source. Don't forget that even though you have changed the words, you still need to cite the original source in your assessment.

Remember: **summary = main ideas but shorter**

paraphrase = same ideas, different words

Both summarising and paraphrasing show that you have understood something. A summary demonstrates at least *literal* comprehension, while a paraphrase demonstrates *interpretive* comprehension (see [Tips for reading effectively Quick Guide](#)).

Both of these skills are also very useful in organising information for assessments.

Example summary

Here is an example of a summary. The original is from an article on social networking in Wikipedia in 2024 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking_service)

Original

A social networking service or SNS (sometimes called a social networking site) is a type of online *social media* platform which people use to build *social networks* or *social relationships* with other people who share personal or career content, interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections.

Most social network services are web-based and provide the means for users to interact over the Internet. Examples of social networking services are email, Facebook and Twitter. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas,

Summary

Social networking services are online platforms or sites that help people with similar interests connect. Most are web-based and users interact over the internet. Some examples are email, Facebook and Twitter.

The summary has picked out the main ideas but reduced the number of words from 72 to 31. If you look at what has been left in and what has been left out you will see that the main content words are still there (*social networking, online, internet*). Some details like *share ideas, activities, events, and interests* have been condensed into one word, 'interact'. A lot of the supporting words have also been left out. For example, *focuses on helping* has been reduced to 'help' and the sentence *most social network services are web-based and provide means for users to interact over the internet* has been reduced to 'most are web-based and users interact over the internet'. This has saved seven words.

Example paraphrase

Original

A social networking service is an *online service*, platform, or site that focuses on helping people to build *social networks* or *social relations* with other people who share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Most social network services are *web-based* and provide the means for users to interact over the *Internet*. Examples of social networking services are *email*, Facebook and Twitter. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests.

Paraphrase

Using social networking services, people with similar interests can connect with each other online through services such as *email*, Facebook and Twitter.

The paraphrase has condensed three sentences into one and has reduced the words from 72 to 22. The main idea has been kept through words like *social networking*, *people with similar interests*, *connect* and *online* but most of the rest of the information has been left out.

A final reminder: Where possible, use paraphrases instead of quotes. They make your work look more original and show that you have put in some effort. Putting together a string of quotes doesn't show either originality or much effort. Finally, make sure you reference the source of any material you paraphrase in your assessment. You should do this with **both** an in-text citation **and** a full reference in your reference list.

Check the *SCU Learning Zone* for more related Quick Guides.