

# How to use paraphrases as evidence

## Academic Skills Quick Guide

Learning how to use paraphrases as evidence will help you to **practise academic integrity** and **demonstrate your understanding** in assignments and exams. This guide offers practical tips and examples to get you started. Use this guide alongside the Quick Guide [‘How to use paraphrases in your writing’](#).

### What is a paraphrase?

A **paraphrase** is where you put the **meaning** of the source into your own words.

Paraphrases can be longer or shorter than the original source.

#### When paraphrasing sources it is important to:

- **keep the original meaning** in the source
- **change the phrasing** (not just change a couple of words)
- always **reference correctly** (to acknowledge you are using others’ work)
- treat the paraphrase as evidence you are using to back your argument or illustrate your perspective.

### Disciplinary writing conventions and using paraphrases as evidence

The key to using paraphrases as evidence is to **blend** them into the rest of your writing. Many new students add referenced paraphrases without any blending. That is, they present paraphrases as if they contain **neutral information**, or **truthful knowledge**. However, even the most credible and rigorous source **interprets** facts and events, and is **open to evaluation**. At university, knowledge is not understood as static or fixed. Instead, knowledge is **constantly reviewed, questioned, updated, and re-made**.

Generally, it is important to show that you understand even credible sources, reviewed by disciplinary peers (including journal articles and textbooks), are **open to evaluation**. One way to do this is by **introducing and unpacking paraphrases**.

### When to blend paraphrases into your writing

Depending on your course or area of study, and the type of assignment, you may not always be expected to ‘blend’ paraphrases into your writing. Always ask your tutor.

#### 1. Disciplinary writing conventions

It is common in scientific writing to treat well-established understanding (credible existing knowledge) about a topic or problem as objective information or scientific fact. In this context, paraphrases are always referenced (to show you are using others’ work) but not blended into your writing.

#### 2. If your task in the assignment is to describe, outline, overview or summarise, but not show critical thinking

Especially in introductory units, assignments involve students demonstrating their understanding of existing knowledge (research), or current debates, by describing, outlining, overviewing or summarising sources.

In these types of assignments students are **not** expected to evaluate sources or add in their ideas and comments. In these types of assignments you do not need to blend paraphrases. Always check with your teacher.

**Remember:** you don’t need to blend paraphrases if you are **not** showing critical thinking by including your own judgements and ideas.

#### Examples of when you do not need to blend paraphrases include when you are:

- outlining existing knowledge on a topic or problem (if writing in a scientific discipline)
- providing background information about a situation, problem, or context
- providing a description of a source, situation, scenario, or context.

Remember, if you are showing critical thinking by offering your own ideas and judgements you need to blend paraphrases.

### Examples of when you should blend paraphrases include when you are:

- commenting on ideas or claims contained in the paraphrase
- evaluating the paraphrase
- using paraphrases as evidence (backing) for your own claims.

## How to blend paraphrases and turn them into good pieces of evidence

Blending paraphrases by **introducing** and **unpacking** them will help you to use them as evidence, to back your point. It does involve thinking about how you can communicate to the marker that the paraphrase offers relevant, credible, and current information, or perspectives.

### Introduce paraphrases

Introducing paraphrases helps establish the credibility of this piece of evidence, and increases the flow of your writing. There are three key elements to **introducing a paraphrase** in your assignments and exams:

1. name the author
2. use a reporting verb
3. identify the expertise of the author, and/or the credibility the source.

The following section provides guidance and examples.

### Introduce paraphrases by naming the author

An essential part of introducing paraphrases is to name the author in the sentence (and not just in the in-text referencing bracket or footnote).

Naming the author(s) attributes the information, ideas, and claims in the paraphrase. That is, you indicate the paraphrase is the expert opinion or finding of the author, and **not** objective truth, or neutral fact.

### Example

#### Original

The goal of rhetorical critics is to advance knowledge about human communication that reaches audiences with public messages (often media messages).

Hence, rhetorical (and other analytic) critics are building a superior, careful awareness of public or mass-mediated messages by rigorous and thoughtful analysis. They examine deep within, around, and behind specific messages to see how they tick.

Source: Pierce, 2003, p. 31

#### Example one

Rhetorical critics are especially interested in analysing how mass media messages work (Pierce, 2003, p. 31).

The example above **does not** introduce the paraphrase by naming the author. It presents paraphrased ideas as neutral facts, or pre-existing phenomena (the way things are).

#### Example two

**According to Pierce**, rhetorical critics are especially interested in analysing how mass media messages work (Pierce, 2003, p. 31).

In the second example (above) the paraphrased ideas are **attributed to the author**. The writer clearly indicates these ideas are Pierce's **expert opinion**. By doing this the writer indicates the paraphrase is open to **evaluation**. The writer could follow up by evaluating the paraphrase. This is often done by adding in a paraphrase from another source.

### Naming the author of paraphrases will help you to:

- more fully acknowledge the author of the paraphrase
- show that you understand even credible sources are open to evaluation
- open up the opportunity to add in **your evaluation** of sources used in your writing.

## Introduce paraphrases using a reporting verb

In academic writing reporting verbs are used to **describe** and **report on** others' work. Reporting verbs can be used to **characterise** sources, and claims.

Reporting verbs are a simple technique used in assignments to **demonstrate understanding** and add the student's **judgement** about the source and its claims.

Carefully selecting reporting verbs can improve the quality of your writing.

### Commonly used reporting verbs:

state(s), contend(s), insist(s), discovered, agree(s), report(s), maintain(s), theorise(s), argue(s), find(s), hypothesise(s), suggest(s), propose(s), reveal(s), explain(s), defines, discuss(es), outline(s), reveal(s).

## Examples

### Example one

Greybourne (2012) **says** that sustainable education is an essential element of building a sustainable future (p. 98).

In example one (above) the writer uses the verb 'says'. This verb does little to describe or judge the source, and the claims made by Greybourne.

### Example two

Greybourne (2012) **insists** that sustainable education is an essential element of building a sustainable future (p. 98)

The second example (above) uses the reporting verb 'insists' to characterise Greybourne's claims as forcefully made, and biased (without balance or consideration for the possibility of alternative view).

### Example three

Greybourne (2012) **reveals** that sustainable education is an essential element of building a sustainable future (p. 98).

In the third example, the verb 'reveal' describes the actions of the author as knowledge maker (what they did to make knowledge). The author is described as **uncovering** (revealing) pre-existing phenomena. This verb also characterises the source as **objective**.

### Carefully selecting reporting verbs used in your writing can help you to:

- introduce sources more effectively (blending them into your writing)
- demonstrate your understanding about the source and the claims it makes
- add in your judgements about sources and author claims.

## Introduce paraphrases by identifying the expertise of the author/credibility of the source

When paraphrasing from a source for the **first time** in an assignment, it is important to establish the **expertise of the author**, and the **relevance and credibility of the source**. This technique shows the reader/marker that you are using credible sources. Using credible sources can improve the credibility and quality of your work.

### This can be done by identifying:

- the expertise of the author in regard to your topic
- the credibility of the source.

## Examples

### Example one

In her study tracking the TV-watching habits and sense of well-being of 1000 Australians from 1999 to 2009, psychologist Adele Mayberry (2010) found there is little correlation between level of happiness and time spent watching TV (p. 33).

### Example two

In a recent editorial, well established TV producer Adele Mayberry (2012) argues there is little correlation between level of happiness and time spent watching TV (p. 33).

In both examples the **expertise of the author** of the source is noted. Psychologists and TV producers have different types of expertise about impacts of TV watching.

In both examples the source is described. This is a subtle way to indicate the **credibility of the source**. At university, usually a scholarly study reviewed by peers and undertaken over a ten-year period with a cohort of 1000 people, is a more credible source than a newspaper editorial based on professional experience and personal opinion.

## Why it is important to identify the expertise of authors

Identifying the expertise of authors is an important technique used to blend paraphrases into your writing and practise academic integrity.

This technique is used in assignments to acknowledge the **type** and **extent** of author expertise. Establishing author expertise **demonstrates your understanding**, and opens up opportunity to **evaluate** claims or ideas contained in the paraphrase. Expertise is usually broken into three types:

- scholarly expertise based on research
- professional expertise based on experiences, understanding and skills developed in the workplace
- personal expertise based on lived experiences, values, and personal opinions.

In academic writing scholarly expertise is usually seen as the most valuable type of expertise. However, depending on the assignment topic and the discipline, professional and personal expertise can be valuable (when combined with scholarly sources).

## Examples

### Example one

#### Scholarly expertise:

**Historian and cultural theorist** Mariana Valverde (1998) argues the alcoholic subject emerges in the United States in the nineteenth century.

### Example two

**Professional expertise:**

**Drawing on twenty years of teaching primary school students in Australia**, Burrige (2012) insists most students arrive at school with a deep desire to learn.

### Example three

**Personal expertise:**

**A recent client of the service**, Adder (2011) suggests his experience of impersonally efficient service is a sign that managing risks is prioritised at the cost of delivering care.

## Why it is important to identify the credibility of sources

Identifying the **credibility of a source** serves two main functions. First, using credible sources **adds to the credibility of your writing** and shows the marker you have read existing knowledge on the assignment topic, issue or problem. Second, this technique is used to indicate the extent of **credibility of a source**.

**Credibility of sources is judged in terms of:**

- currency
- relevance
- reliability.

## Examples

### Example one

**Currency:**

Blake's (2010) **recent study** of obesity patterns ...

Doord's (1979) **dated study** of obesity patterns ...

### Example two

**Relevance:**

As a result of cultural differences between Australia and Norway, Maximo's (2012) analysis **is of limited relevance to this discussion** ...

While cultural differences between Norway and Australia are important to note, Maximos' (2012) findings offer insight into ...

### Example three

**Reliability:**

Undertaken between 1995 and 2010, with a sample size of 200, and in-depth interviews with each participant, this study is a reliable source of information about ...

Surveying over 100 recent publications from credible scientific journals, this review article is a reliable source of information about ...

Based on blog posts made by five volunteers at the recent Olympic Games, this source has limited reliability ...

## Tips for blending paraphrases into your writing

- When paraphrasing, always put the **meaning of the source into your own words**, and **reference**.
- Check whether your area of study, and the assessment task require you to blend paraphrases into your writing.
- Where appropriate, introduce paraphrases to show you understand the source is open to evaluation.
- When blending paraphrases, introduce them by:
  - naming the author
  - using a reporting verb
  - identifying the expertise of the author, and/or the credibility the source.
- When blending paraphrases, unpack them in order to add your ideas and judgements.
- Unpack a paraphrase by:
  - explaining its significance (how is the paraphrase relevant to the point you are making in the paragraph/ assignment?)
  - evaluating the paraphrase (strengths and/or weaknesses)
  - including your judgements about the ideas/claims contained in the paraphrase
  - using the ideas contained in the paraphrase to explain a problem or example.