

PARAPHRASE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM



Overview

The ability to paraphrase well, along with summary and direct quotation, is one of the most essential—and often overlooked—skills in the college-level writing classroom. We assume our students enter with this ability; however, for many of our students, the concept remains vague and their experiences are far from uniform. This can lead to all sorts of problems: sloppy written work, poor material comprehension, and at worse, plagiarized passages. Here at Emory, our international students may come from countries which don't hold the same ideas about intellectual property as we do in the United States. Even our domestic students, while expected to paraphrase in earlier education, may never have received clear, explicit instruction. Taking even one day to teach effective paraphrasing can improve student writing and material comprehension, and help them avoid accidental plagiarism.

Why Take Time to Teach It?

Improves Students' Writing Ability

Accurately synthesizing the ideas of others into their own language leads to more sophisticated prose.

Improves Critical Thinking Skills

Asking students to rephrase ideas completely in their own words and sentence structures helps them to deeply process what a passage means.

Provides Clarity Against Plagiarism

Many students are anxious about the boundaries of plagiarism; others simply don't know any better, believing that swapping out a few synonyms alone constitutes "one's own language."

How-To: Stages for Student Learning

1. Read about effective [paraphrase](#) + patchwork [plagiarism](#)
2. Identify models with differing levels of effective paraphrase [class discuss]
3. Practice paraphrasing a passage from class text [small group review + revise]

Who Will Appreciate This?



International
Students



Domestic
Students



You, the
Instructor



Other Faculty



Administrators

A paraphrase is a restatement of an author's idea, completely in your own language, that properly credits the source. When employed effectively, it is an essential tool of academic writing.

Paraphrase Criteria

- On the first instance, opens with author and title; ends with a page number citation.
- Completely written in your own words.
- Completely written with your own sentence patterns.
- Includes all key ideas.
- Accurately represents the original ideas.
- Separates the author's ideas from your own ideas. (Don't include your opinions inside a paraphrase. Make sure they are separate.)

The following paragraph comes from Paul Tough's *New York Times* article, "Who Gets to Graduate?" Read through the excerpt and then the following three examples of a paraphrase. Answer the questions that follow.

There are thousands of students like Vanessa at the University of Texas, and millions like her throughout the country — high-achieving students from low-income families who want desperately to earn a four-year degree but who run into trouble along the way. Many are derailed before they ever set foot on a campus, tripped up by complicated financial-aid forms or held back by the powerful tug of family obligations. Some don't know how to choose the right college, so they drift into a mediocre school that produces more dropouts than graduates. Many are overwhelmed by expenses or take on too many loans. And some do what Vanessa was on the verge of doing: They get to a good college and encounter what should be a minor obstacle, and they freak out. They don't want to ask for help, or they don't know how. Things spiral, and before they know it, they're back at home, resentful, demoralized and in debt. (2)

- A. There are literally thousands of students at the University of Texas who want to earn a four year degree but don't. They get held up before even coming to campus because of overly complex financial-aid forms or because of family obligations. Some choose bad schools because they don't know better. Others get into debt. Others, like Vanessa Brewer, get into good colleges but then have a breakdown when they encounter what should be temporary obstacles. Without help, they drop out, and are left demoralized and full of debt.
- B. Paul Tough, in "Who Gets to Graduate?," says that there are many obstacles which face low-income college students. Primarily, they face a financial aid process which makes it difficult to get the money they need for college, and even those that do receive financial aid may be forced to drop out because of familial obligations (2).

C. In his article, "Who Gets to Graduate?," Paul Tough notes that low-income students face many obstacles that prevent them from graduating from college, all of which have nothing to do with their abilities. Many must navigate pressures and responsibilities from their families and then a daunting financial aid process in order to make it into a classroom. For those who do make it into a good college classroom, the financial and academic stresses keep mounting. Many of them—who are good students—are unable to find support when suddenly faced with temporary academic setbacks, like a poor grade. Instead, with all these external pressures and little encouragement, they wind up dropping out (2).

1. Which is the best paraphrase of the passage?

2. Why? List all possible reasons.

3. Which is the worst paraphrase of the passage?

4. Why? List all possible reasons.

