

Easy steps to help you paraphrase.

Quoting and paraphrasing are academic writing skills which can demonstrate your understanding of content. The skill of using evidence and paraphrasing works along a continuum, from using quotations at the easiest end through paraphrasing to demonstrating a truly embedded understanding. You can follow the paraphrasing process to help you develop your paraphrasing ability.



Quoting.

In a quotation, you take the words exactly as they are from the source. Use quotation marks to indicate where the phrase begins and ends. Here is an example:

Academic writing is “a game with bewildering rules, many of which are never made explicit to student writers” (Horwood and Hadley, 2004, p.356). This means that students don’t always receive clear information on the protocols of academic writing.

Quotations are probably the easiest way to use information from sources, and for this reason are often used too much. To use quotations well, however, is more difficult. Notice that in the example, a sentence follows the quotation which explains how the student understands and interprets the quote. This is essential whenever you use a direct quotation; you cannot let it ‘speak for itself’, but rather you need to integrate it into your assignment and show the reader why it is relevant. If you copy a direct quotation, then you need to make sure it corresponds exactly with the original. The length of the quotation dictates whether you should embed it into the body of your text (see full [Referencing guides](#) for details).

Paraphrasing.

This is where you put the ideas into your own words. This is almost the opposite of a quotation, as when you paraphrase you try to communicate the meaning of the original text accurately, but in different words. Keep the flavour of the idea but present it in a different form. Paraphrasing demonstrates to the reader that you understand the information you have paraphrased, whereas quotations (when used without an explanation) do not always show this.

Learning Development

To paraphrase effectively, first identify the keywords from the quotation and exchange them for synonyms you would use. This helps you to simplify the quotation and arrange it so that it fits into your writing structure. You could exchange the words “bewildering”, “explicit” and the name of the population that the quotation discusses; in this case it is “student writers.” You still need to provide a reference as you are using someone else’s idea in your own words.

Example of exchanged synonyms:

Academic writing has a **confusing** set of rules, that are never made **clear** to **learners** (Horwood and Hadley, 2004, p.356).

Notice that the words “bewildering”, “explicit” and “student” writers have been exchanged for “confusing”, “clear” and “learners”. The sentence structure remains the same but some words are exchanged. This is only a start. A good paraphrase will have different sentence structure as well as different words (unless they are keywords with no appropriate synonyms).

Example of exchanged synonyms and flipped sentence:

Learners are not given clarity on the confusing set of rules of academic writing (Horwood and Hadley, 2004, p.356).

Here the sentence has changed the order of the synonyms exchanged. By altering the structure of the sentence, you may also change a verb to a noun or a noun to verb. In addition, you could leave out elements of the original source to help it fit with your own writing. If you are really struggling, you can follow these steps to write your paraphrase:

- underline the main ideas and change the order in which they are expressed,
- consider which words can be exchanged for synonyms,
- consider which sections can be left out,
- modify the grammar where necessary.

Example of an embedded understanding:

Learners are not clear on the boundaries or expectations of academic writing (Horwood and Hadley, 2004, p.356).

An embedded understanding demonstrates that you understand the idea and can express it without using the same structure or words as the original. It is the same flavour but in a different form. This is a skill you can use once you are confident that you understand the content. Moving through the paraphrasing continuum will help you to develop your writing and improve your use of sources.

Sources used:

Harwood, N. and Hadley, G. (2004) Demystifying institutional practices: critical pragmatism and the teaching of academic writing. *English for Specific Purposes*, **23** pp.355-377.