

Basics

Paraphrasing is rewriting something using your own words. It is a way of talking about other people's ideas in your writing. Sometimes a paraphrase is similar to the original phrase – as if you are retelling a familiar story. At other times the paraphrase is very different to the original – as if you are translating something into a different language.

The academic context

In academic writing, people use paraphrases to refer to important research in their discipline and acknowledge other people's ideas. Referencing other people's work is very important in academic writing – many scholarly works refer to hundreds of different books or research papers! It's important to cite your sources when you paraphrase – for more details, see *Avoid plagiarism*.

Key features

1 Use a reporting verb

Academic writers signal a paraphrase by giving the author's name followed by a 'reporting' verb. Sometimes, other details – such as the name or date of a publication – are included. For example:

Achebe *suggests* that ...

Smith (1988) *states* that ...

In Liberalism (2014), Losurdo *argues* that ...

2 Use synonyms

Synonyms are words with a similar meaning. They help you to rephrase a statement or idea in different words. Some common academic English synonyms are below. You can use a thesaurus to look up synonyms, but choose carefully – they do not always have exactly the same meaning as the original word!

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advantage / benefit • consequence / effect / outcome • data / evidence / information • disadvantage / drawback • idea / concept / hypothesis / principle / theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • argue / contend / indicate / state / suggest • create / make / construct • decrease / fall • demonstrate / prove / show • evaluate / examine / scrutinize • increase / rise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • important / essential / key / significant • negative / adverse • positive / beneficial

3 Use a different form of the word

Sometimes you can rephrase an idea by changing word forms. For example, the word *context* (noun) can be changed to *contextualize* (verb), *contextual* (adjective) or *contextually* (adverb).

4 Use noun phrases

Noun phrases can be very useful for expanding an idea (turning a short phrase into a more detailed paraphrase) or condensing it (paraphrasing something complex in a few words). Look at examples A and B on the next page. In example A, the writer uses an expanded paraphrase to interpret the original phrase in more detail. In example B, a condensed paraphrase is used to refer briefly to the original idea.

A	Original phrase	Expanded paraphrase
	<i>social skills</i>	<i>ability to communicate with and relate to others</i>
B	Original phrase	Condensed paraphrase
	<i>imposition of digital elements onto the physical world</i>	<i>digitally augmented reality</i>

5 Change the order of information

People often paraphrase in academic writing by changing the order of information. In the paraphrase below, the original **subject** is used as the object, and the original **object** becomes the subject. The paraphrase is now just one sentence, with the two **examples** included between commas.

Original	Paraphrase
Perhaps the most important benefits of playing video games are the apparent improvements they can cause in our mental health . As many of us can testify, games can be very effective at reducing stress . But they have also been shown to help with depression .	Hughes (2017) argues that the improvements video games can cause in our mental health , for example in reducing stress and helping with depression , may be their most important benefits .

Challenges / difficulties

Paraphrasing complex ideas is difficult. Never paraphrase long sentences or whole paragraphs one word at a time – you'll write nonsense and probably plagiarize too! If you're struggling, instead of focusing on the original words, shut your book and try to express the idea as simply as possible. Challenge yourself to write it in just a few words. Then look at your reading text again and edit your work.

In academic writing, paraphrases have to be accurate; but they are not always 'neutral'. Since you have to change some words, academic writers sometimes use paraphrases to interpret other people's opinions – and this can involve a positive or negative judgment. Look out for this in your reading!

How can I develop this skill?

Practise telling other people about what you are studying. If you have a friend who is studying a different course, see if you can tell each other about something you have read this week. Can you convey some of the key points in a few sentences? Try asking and answering questions, too.

Learning outcome

Students who have mastered this skill will be able to paraphrase complex texts. They will have a good grasp of academic vocabulary and grammar, and will be confident using this to interpret reading material.

Theory to practice

Find phrases in text B that paraphrase the numbered phrases in text A.

A

As well as **encouraging¹ physical activity²** and stimulating children's **creativity and imagination³**, play has a **vital role⁴** in developing **social skills⁵**. But until **recently⁶**, most people **were sceptical about⁷** video games having similar benefits. However, not only does the research suggest **cognitive benefits⁸** to video games; it seems they can also **have positive effects on our behaviour⁹**. One study **shows¹⁰** that **'gamers'¹¹** are likely to be better at **multitasking effectively¹²**. Another study suggests that **video game music¹³** is the best type to listen to while we work. It seems the music is designed specifically to **allow for maximum focus and concentration¹⁴**.

B

Hughes and Scott-Barrett (2017) suggest that until a short time ago, people generally doubted that video games could perform the essential function of play in nurturing children's motor skills, their imaginative and creative capacities, and their ability to communicate with and relate to others. He argues that these doubts may have been groundless, however. Recent research demonstrates that playing games can help people to develop better processes of understanding and also to do tasks better. For example, people who play video games may find it easier to do several tasks simultaneously, and listening to music composed for video games can help you to apply yourself to a piece of work.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____

- 8 _____
- 9 _____
- 10 _____
- 11 _____
- 12 _____
- 13 _____
- 14 _____

Ways to get more practice

Find a short text and paraphrase it. Then swap with a partner. (Don't show them the original.) Now paraphrase your partner's paraphrase! Look at the original texts together. Are they similar to the two 'copies'? What's good about each copy? What's strange?