

### Basics

Rephrasing is very close to *paraphrasing* (see the worksheet on that). It involves saying the same thing using different words. We do this a lot when we're talking and we say, for example, 'Let me put it another way ...'. Reasons for rephrasing include making something more or less *positive*, *confrontational*, *polite*, *formal*, etc. Of course, we also rephrase because we want to make something clearer, which involves *explaining*. An academic writer might want to make his/her ideas clearer by making a point and then explaining that point. In addition, academic writers often need to explain the ideas or findings of others.

### The academic context

Rephrasing and explaining can be found throughout all academic writing, therefore it is important to be able to identify when this is being done. You need to notice *signal words and phrases* (see the worksheet on them). For example, a writer might introduce rephrasing with *In other words ... / By this I mean ... / To put it another way ...*

Very often, a paragraph will begin with a *topic sentence* (the main point of the paragraph). This is then followed by *supporting sentences*, which could be examples, but more often than not include some kind of explanation of the topic sentence. Again, *signal words and phrases* will help you follow the flow of the writing. For example, *due to ...* might indicate a cause; *resulting in ...* might indicate a result, etc.

As the reader, you need to use rephrasing and explaining to help you understand the point the writer is making. Learning to do this helps you to do it yourself when it comes to your own academic writing. They are also useful speaking skills.

### Key features

As with paraphrasing, rephrasing and explaining both need a rich vocabulary so that you can recognise (and later use) linguistic devices and techniques such as the following:

- Synonyms and alternative phrases (e.g. *leading to* = *resulting in*)
- Antonyms and structures to say the opposite (e.g. *I'm not disappointed* = *I'm (quite) satisfied*)
- Phrasal verbs and their more regular alternatives (e.g. *put up with* = *tolerate*)
- Specific words to convey precise meanings (e.g. *be confused* = *not know what to do*)
- Different word forms (e.g. *We need to* = *It is necessary to* = *There is a need/necessity for*)
- Different sentence structures (e.g. beginning with a *conditional*, a *gerund*, a *passive* or a *subject-verb clause*)

Signal words and phrases can help you identify when a writer is going to rephrase or explain something. These include:

#### For rephrasing

*In other words ... / To put it another way ... / Put differently ...*

#### For explaining

*By this I mean ... / What I mean by this is ... / To explain ...*

### Challenges / difficulties

One of the biggest challenges is learning to use these techniques in your own academic writing. You need to build up a large vocabulary with alternative ways of expressing things.

### How can I develop this skill?

Reading a lot will enrich your vocabulary. Pay attention to how writers rephrase or explain things. Incorporate their techniques into your own writing and practise them that way.

## Learning outcome

Learning this skill helps you to understand the text as a whole, so you will get more out of the texts you read. This understanding can then be applied to your own academic writing to make it more effective.

## Theory to practice

Look at the numbered words and phrases and discuss the questions on them.

<sup>1</sup> Use common sense when you assess how accurate and useful statistics are. For example, are the numbers correct? If a report claims that 70% of customers prefer product A, and 40% prefer product B, clearly the figures do not add up correctly. Sometimes figures are presented out of context. <sup>2</sup> If you see an advertisement that claims 'contains 50 grams less fat', ask yourself 'less fat than what?' Reliable articles or reports quote the organization or author that is the source of their statistics and mention the date when the data was collected. If these details are not included, use the internet to <sup>3</sup> search for other reports or articles with the same information. <sup>4</sup> If you can't find any, the original report or article probably contains statistics that are incorrect, or even <sup>5</sup> made up. Reports based on research should always say how many people were involved in an experiment or survey. If a psychological experiment reports that the findings are based on interviewing 100 students at one university, <sup>6</sup> the results are unlikely to apply to all students at all universities because the sample of students interviewed was too small.

- 1 How can you make this sentence more formal by using passive voice and changing *accurate* and *useful* into their noun forms?

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- 2 The sentence is rephrased below. What effect has rephrasing had?

*An advertisement claiming that a product contains 50 grams less fat needs to be treated with caution because the word 'less' is relative.*

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- 3 Which common phrasal verb could you use here? \_\_\_\_\_

- 4 How can you make this more formal? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 5 Which three words from the following can replace *made up*?

falsified / fabricated / false / made / discovered / fictitious / right \_\_\_\_\_

- 6 If we use the antonym here, how can we complete the phrase?

*the results are likely to apply to* \_\_\_\_\_

## Ways to get more practice

Reading a lot is the best way. Note down useful phrases and alternative ways of expressing the same idea. As with paraphrasing, in your own speaking and writing, practise rephrasing and explaining in different words (e.g. 'In other words ...'; 'What I mean by this is ...').