

Paraphrasing: Using Your Own Words

UHCL Writing Center
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Paraphrasing

- paraphrase (n.), from Greek, Latin, and French roots, meaning to “to tell” and “beside”
- translates in older uses as “to tell in other words” or a “free rendering”
- meant to be a retelling of information in unique words, not word for word
- commonly used and/or required in academic writing

Paraphrasing

- Being able to paraphrase shows that the author understands a concept and does not have to rely on the author's original wording to explain a concept.
- Academic writing benefits from paraphrasing in several ways:
 - the paper is not filled with distracting quotes
 - the author can continue her writing style rather than breaking it up with that of other authors' quotes
 - ideas are more easily connected and related
 - the overall argument of a paper is stronger in part because of the authority the author shows over the material

What makes a paraphrase good?

- A good paraphrase discusses or explains another author's argument or point of view in new words.
- It should show original thought and consideration, not simply rewording using synonyms. This includes different sentence structure.
- It should fit in well with the writing surrounding it and flow with the paragraph in which it is found.
- It must reference the author in some way to give credit, either in the sentence or as a parenthetical citation.

What makes a paraphrase bad?

- It does not use original wording and is very close to or incorrectly quotes material.
- The wording does not show consideration and instead keeps the same structure with only a few words replaced.
- It does not fit the writing style of its paragraph.
- It is awkwardly placed and used as if it were a quote. (Sometimes quotes and paraphrases of the same material sound better in different spots.)
- It does not capture the right concept or idea—perhaps the quote sounded good but a paraphrase loses its overall importance.

Let's look at some examples...

Original sentence: Ethical issues in the aviation industry can be difficult to nail down because there are so many departments working in tandem for a single action. When accidents occur, it can be a trying task to determine if ethical boundaries were crossed and at which point one individual was more responsible than another.

Poor paraphrase: Ethical issues in the aviation industry are trying to identify because several departments work together with each task. When crashes occur, it can be difficult to understand if ethical limits were violated and at which point someone was more responsible than someone else.

Good paraphrase: Within the aviation industry, identifying ethical issues might be difficult and evasive at times due to the cooperative nature of departments, such as operating an aircraft, when multiple individuals participate in one action. Therefore, pointing the finger at one individual can be impossible when clear lines for responsibility are not drawn.

Let's look at some more examples...

Original sentence: The marketing campaigns of Fortune 500 companies is often found to follow or in some cases be ahead of purchasing trends of their identified consumers. Many contribute this ability to lead consumers' buying power to basic tasks such as customer surveys and global comparisons of economic factors.

Poor paraphrase: The marketing strategies of Fortune 500 companies usually follows or in some case is ahead of buying trends of their customers . Experts contribute this phenomenon to lead customers' purchasing power to tasks such as client surveys and comparisons of global economic factors.

Good paraphrase: Research has identified a phenomenon in which Fortune 500 companies are able to guide their consumers toward specific purchases through marketing items such as consideration of economic factors and survey responses; this event shows that such companies often employ marketing strategies that anticipate consumers' purchases and follow in buying trends.

Now you try—is this a good paraphrase?

Original sentence: The McDonnell Douglas DC-10 was designed to carry 250-380 passengers for long domestic flights and upon its introduction to the market carried brought about new features, such as an outward-opening cargo door to offer more space for luggage. However, two major in-flight accidents, one in 1974 and one in 1979, occurred on DC-10s as a result of an improperly locking mechanism that could not keep the cargo door shut when the aircraft was pressurized. After an investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board, which ensures safety in the aviation industry, required McDonnell Douglas to replace the cargo door mechanisms in a way that prevented them from failing during flight.

Paraphrase: Many commercial aircraft are introduced to the market with design flaws that carry disastrous consequences. For example, the McDonnell Douglas DC-10, used for domestic flights, introduced new features, such as a more spacious outward-opening cargo door. Due to a poor locking mechanism, two major in-flight accidents occurred with the aircraft because the cargo door would be blown open during flight when the aircraft was pressurized. After their investigation, the NTSB required McDonnell Douglas to repair the cargo door mechanisms to prevent further during flight.

Now you try—is this a good paraphrase? (cont.)

Original sentence: The McDonnell Douglas DC-10 was designed to carry 250-380 passengers for long domestic flights and upon its introduction to the market carried brought about new features, such as an outward-opening cargo door to offer more space for luggage. However, two major in-flight accidents, one in 1974 and one in 1979, occurred on DC-10s as a result of an improperly locking mechanism that could not keep the cargo door shut when the aircraft was pressurized. After an investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board, which ensures safety in the aviation industry, required McDonnell Douglas to replace the cargo door mechanisms in a way that prevented them from failing during flight.

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Now, try rewriting it yourself...

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Paraphrase: Many commercial aircraft are introduced to the market with design flaws that carry disastrous consequences. For example, the DC-10, a jumbo jet designed for domestic travel, hailed a new, spacious cargo door design that opened outward instead of inward; the locking mechanisms, however, did not work properly and failed at least twice during flight, causing two deadly crashes. Consequently, the NTSB required that the DC-10's manufacturer repair the failed units, grounding the aircrafts until all fixes had been accomplished.

Let's consider another one—is this a good paraphrase?

Original sentence: Oil companies are finding that the market for liquid pipelines is not only a lucrative investment and often times a next step for those who start in the industry with transportation of gas. The economy began to show improvement in 2011 when gasoline prices rose, again offering the oil industry room for growth and rebirth, though many companies had already felt the sting of the recession and could not recover. Economists expect that the oil market will continue to develop and perhaps reach an all-time high before another recession creates similar effects in 30-40 years.

Paraphrase: Companies within the oil industry have discovered that liquid pipelines are a lucrative investment, especially for those who introduced themselves as transports for gas; some companies had already experienced the recession to the point of no return when the economy began to improve in 2011, allowing some businesses to rebuild and develop their markets. On the plus side, economists predict that the oil market will improve for the next 30-40 years before we experience another recession, allowing the oil industry to reach an all-time high for growth.

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Time to try your own...

Original sentence: Recent studies have found that students pursuing minors along with their degrees tend to have a clearer understanding of their goals and ideas regarding the careers they wish to pursue. As a consequence, the U.S. Department of Education has initiated a program to encourage universities across the country to develop relevant minors to offer to all degree programs. The program, dubbed Minor in Educational Success, will launch in 2016 and provide grants up to \$100,000 to universities who are initiating a minor program or developing a currently existing minor program to increase their offerings by more than 75%.

What is your paraphrase?

Practice paraphrasing...

The new art show, sponsored by Reliant Energy, will focus on works by young, Houstonian artists who highlight various mediums of expression. Of particular note is the event's attention to artists currently studying at inner-city schools where funding for art programs have been cut recently. There is a need for supporting such skills among adolescents, and, in a show of support for this cause, the Association of Psychologists in Houston has funded a contest in which the winning piece will bring its young artist a \$1000 scholarship to the art school of his or her choice.