GUIDELINES FOR PARAPHRASING SOURCES

Paraphrasing

We have all watched a good television show or an interesting news story that we wanted to tell others about. When you are explaining the show or story, you most likely tell your friends, your family, or your coworkers what happened, how it happened, and why it happened. In doing so, you describe things like the plot, the main characters, the events, and the important points using your own words. This skill is paraphrasing—using your own words to express someone else's message or ideas.

When you paraphrase in writing, the ideas and meaning of the original source must be maintained; the main ideas need to come through, but the wording has to be your own. And, of course, credit needs to be given to the author. You don't want to over quote in your paper. A great alternative to quoting is to paraphrase information. However, paraphrasing takes a little more skill than directly quoting information, because, to paraphrase correctly, you need to understand what the original quote or passage is about in order to write about it in your words.

How Do You Paraphrase a Source?

- Read the original two or three times or until you understand it and its meaning.
- Put the original aside and try to write the main ideas in your own words. Say what the source says, but no more, and try to reproduce the source's order of ideas and emphasis.
- Look closely at unfamiliar words, observing carefully the exact sense in which the writer uses the words.
- Check your paraphrase, as often as needed, against the original for accurate tone and meaning, changing any words or phrases that match the original too closely. If the wording of the paraphrase is too close to the wording of the original, then it can be considered plagiarism.
- If you choose to use exact words or phrases from the original source, quote them in your paraphrased version.
- Try to keep your paraphrased version near the same length of the original text. For example, if the paragraph you are paraphrasing is five sentences long, try to make your paraphrased paragraph five sentences as well.
- Include a citation for the source of the information (including the page numbers, if available) so that you can cite the source accurately. Even when you paraphrase, you must still give credit to the original author.

When Is Paraphrasing Useful?

You should paraphrase when...
- you want to express the author's idea but not necessarily the author's language;
- you want to clarify an author's ideas for the reader and/or for yourself;
- you want an alternative to quoting;
- you want to integrate information from charts, graphs, tables, lectures, etc; or
- you need an authority on the topic or to support your ideas.
**Examples of Good Paraphrasing**

Paraphrasing can be done with individual sentences or entire paragraphs. Here are some examples:

**Original sentence #1:**

“Her life spanned years of incredible change for women” (Smith, 2015, p.1).

**Paraphrased version:**

Mary lived through an era of liberating reform for women (Smith, 2015, p.1).

**Original sentence #2:**

“Giraffes like Acacia leaves and hay, and they can consume 65 pounds of food a day” (“National Geographic,” 2013, p.16).

**Paraphrased version:**

A giraffe can eat up to 65 pounds of Acacia leaves and hay every day (“National Geographic,” 2013, p.16).

As you can see in the examples, the essence and meaning of the paraphrased versions are similar to the original sentences. The paraphrased sentences even used the main keywords from the original source, but the order and the structure of the sentence changed when the author put the information in his own words. You can apply these same tactics to paraphrasing longer texts as well. Here is an example of how to paraphrase a paragraph of information:

**Original paragraph:**

“The feminization of clerical work and teaching by the turn of the century reflected the growth of business and public education. It also reflected limited opportunities elsewhere. Throughout the nineteenth century, stereotyping of work by sex had restricted women’s employment. Job options were limited; any field that admitted women attracted a surplus of applicants willing to work for less pay than men would have received. The entry of women into such fields—whether grammar school teaching or office work—drove down wages.”


**Paraphrased version:**

According to Nancy Woloch (2002) in *Women and the American Experience: A Concise History*, the “feminization” of jobs in the nineteenth century had two major effects: a lack of employment opportunities for women and inadequate compensation for positions that were available. Thus, while clerical and teaching jobs indicated a boom in these sectors, women were forced to apply for jobs that would pay them less than male workers were paid (p. 170).

This version is properly paraphrased because...

- It introduces the source in a proper signal phrase;
- It is approximately the same length as the original passage;
- It resembles the original passage’s own words and sentence structure;
- It encloses a keyword from the original source within quotation marks; and
- It includes a parenthetical citation in correct APA format.