



# Paraphrasing

## A Definition

Paraphrasing is the use of another's ideas to enhance your own work. In a paraphrase, you rewrite in your own words the ideas taken from the source. Paraphrases avoid excessive reliance on quotations and demonstrate that you understand the source author's argument. A paraphrase always has a different sentence structure and word choice. When done well, it is much more concise than the original.

Good writers signal paraphrases through clauses such as "Werner Sollors, in *Beyond Ethnicity*, argues that..." These phrases indicate the source of the paraphrase and help integrate the borrowed ideas into your own work. Because a paraphrase is your restatement of a borrowed idea, it is not set within quotation marks. Though the ideas may be borrowed, your writing must be original; simply changing a few words or rearranging words or sentences is not paraphrasing. In fact, it's plagiarism, a severe academic offense that can result in expulsion from the university.

## Proper Citation

Remember that paraphrases, just like direct quotations, must be cited. While the words may be your own, the ideas are still borrowed, and you must acknowledge your source. Consult your instructor, a UWC consultant, a UWC handout on documentation, or a relevant handbook if you have questions about how to cite your sources. The following examples use MLA style.

## Note taking and Paraphrasing

Good note-taking can improve your paraphrases. When taking notes, do not copy words from a source unless you intend to quote that source. Rather, read carefully, think, and then write, in your own words, the main ideas you have read. Be sure to note the source for proper citation. Skipping the note-taking step and paraphrasing directly from a source into your draft limits your ability to think through the ideas and increases the risk that you will commit negligent plagiarism. Use note taking to develop and organize your own ideas.

## The Wrong Way to Paraphrase #1: Failure to Cite Source

**Original Passage:** "They desire, for example, virtue and the absence of vice, no less really than pleasure and the absence of pain."

Source: Mill, John Stuart. "Utilitarianism." *On Liberty and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Quote is from page 169.

**Paraphrase:** People want morality just as much as they want happiness.

**Explanation:** This paraphrase is an accurate summary of the above passage, but is incorrectly paraphrased because it does not cite the source of its main ideas. The author of this paraphrase has plagiarized the ideas of another.

## The Wrong Way to Paraphrase #2: Lack of Significant Rewording

**Original Passage:** “To the young American architects who made the pilgrimage, the most dazzling figure of all was Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School. Gropius opened the Bauhaus in Weimar, the German capital, in 1919. It was more than a school; it was a commune, a spiritual movement, a radical approach to art in all its forms, a philosophical center comparable to the Garden of Epicurus.”

Source: Wolfe, Tom. *From Bauhaus to Our House*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981. Quote is from page 10.

**Paraphrase:** As Tom Wolfe notes, to young American architects who went to Germany, the most dazzling figure was Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School (10). Gropius opened the Bauhaus in the German capital of Weimar in 1919. It was, however, more than a school; it was a commune, a spiritual movement, a philosophical center like the Garden of Epicurus.

**Explanation:** This excerpt is not a paraphrase at all; it is too similar to the source. Rather than summarizing the ideas, it uses the same words and structure as the original. This author has committed plagiarism by misrepresenting another’s work as his own.

## The Right Way to Paraphrase

**Original Passage:** “The Republican Convention of 1860, which adopted planks calling for a tariff, internal improvements, a Pacific railroad and a homestead law, is sometimes seen as a symbol of Whig triumph within the party. A closer look, however, indicates that the Whig’s triumph within the party was of a very tentative nature.”

Source: Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970. Quote is from page 175.

**Paraphrase:** Contrary to many historians, Eric Foner argues that the Republican platform of 1860 should not be understood as an indication of Whig dominance of the party (175).

**Explanation:** This paraphrase is properly cited and represents an accurate and concise summary of the source.

This handout was adapted from “Academic Integrity,” a web publication of the Office of the Dean of Student, Student Judicial Services, <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/academicintegrity.html>, originally prepared and adapted for this handout by Matthew Hedstrom.