Paraphrase

What is paraphrasing?
When you paraphrase, you take ideas from a text and express them in your own words. A paraphrase should be concise and easy to understand while maintaining clear attribution to the original author(s).

When should I paraphrase?
You paraphrase for a variety of reasons:

- To maintain your own voice in your writing while capturing specific details from an author
- To emphasize a writer’s ideas, but not their words

Who uses paraphrase?
All disciplines make use of paraphrase to incorporate research into writing. Some disciplines, however, such as the social sciences and STEM fields, use paraphrase almost exclusively instead of direct quotation.

How do I paraphrase?
Paraphrasing can be broken down into simple steps:

1. Read
First you must take time to read and make sure you fully understand the material. Don’t just read the sentences you want to paraphrase. Read around those sentences, so that you understand the context of what the writer wrote.

2. Write
Once you understand the material well, put the original text away and try to write down the author’s ideas with your own words. Try these different strategies:

- Change the sentence structure
- Replace specific words with synonyms
- Modify parts of speech (e.g., use transform instead of transformative)
- Change verb forms (e.g., switch from was transformed to transform)

3. Compare
Compare the paraphrase with the original to ensure you haven’t used the same language.

4. Integrate
Let your reader know in advance that a quote or paraphrase is coming. You do this by signaling, which involves two components: an attribution (the author’s name and/or title of the text) and a signal verb.

For example,
Wheat and barley, collected from the Virginia field site, were discussed (Cargill & O’Connor, 2009).

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Cargill and O'Connor (2009) discussed wheat and barley collected from the Virginia field site.

The choice of signal verb is important because it tells the reader what you think about the source text being paraphrased. Consider, for example, the difference between *alleges* and *affirms*. The former casts doubt on the statement, while the latter projects confidence and demonstrates agreement. For more help with choosing signal verbs, see Reporting verbs.

5. Check for success

After you have expressed the author’s ideas in your own words, ask yourself two questions:

- To what extent did I rephrase the original work in my own words? This can range from directly quoting the original language (verbatim) to completely rewording the original language (in your own words). You want a paraphrase to be in your own words.
- To what degree does my writing preserve the meaning of the original source text? This can range from inaccurate to accurate. You always want your summary and paraphrasing to represent the original work as accurately as possible.

6. Cite

Citing involves two parts: including in-text citations and building a bibliography. Use a citation style appropriate for your discipline.