

## Lecture 5: Paraphrasing and summarizing

In the course of dissertation writing, students are supposed to paraphrase and summarize several sources they come across. The objective is to express the ideas in their own words to avoid falling into the trap of plagiarism. Paraphrasing and summarizing are two difficult skills in academic writing because they require active reading, effective comprehension and accurate reproduction of the original text.

### 1. Paraphrasing

In its broadest sense, paraphrasing refers to the process of reproducing the original text in the writer's own words.

#### 1.1. Definition

Following Bowker (2007: 13), paraphrasing means “to restate information using different words. Unlike summarizing though, paraphrasing focuses less on shortening and condensing the information. Paraphrasing aims to rewrite the information by drawing on different words and phrases”. Consider this example.

##### *Examples*

“Children spend a very large proportion of their daily lives in school. They go there to learn, not only in a narrow academic sense, but in the widest possible interpretation of the word – about themselves, about being a person within a group of others, about the community in which they live, and about the world around them. Schools provide the setting in which such learning takes place.”

Leyden, S. (1985). *Helping the child of exceptional ability*. London: Croom Helm, page 38.

##### *Paraphrasing*

###### *Author citation in the body of the sentence*

As Leyden (1985) points out, schools are places where children spend a significant amount of time. Beyond merely going to school to learn academic information, Leyden argues that learning occurs within a far wider context as children also learn about who they are, by being in groups, their local community, as well as the wider world which surrounds them. Hence, schools offer the settings to facilitate children's learning about a great many things.

Source: Bowker (2007: 13)

From the above example, it is shown that paraphrasing is a rewritten statement of the original text in the writer's own words. Paraphrasing keeps the same idea and length of the original material. In other words, it is a restatement of the information in different words, but maintaining the same meaning.

To produce an effective paraphrase, one needs to follow these steps:

- Replacing difficult vocabulary words or phrases with words the student understands
- Rewriting lengthy or complex sentences into simpler sentences, or combining simple sentences into more interesting, complex sentences
- Explaining concepts and abstract ideas from sentences or passages using more clear and concise wording
- Translating ideas and information into students' own words

Moreover, the paraphrased version needs to be significantly different from the author's original version. Copying large parts from the original text and changing few phrases is not an acceptable paraphrase. Similarly, keeping the same sentence structure with minor phrase changes does not make the paraphrased version different from the author's original version. Consider this illustration (Bowker 2007: 15).

*Example*

"**Capital** represents human creations that are used in the production of goods and services. We often distinguish between human capital and physical capital. *Human capital* consists of the knowledge and skills people develop (through education and formal or on-the-job training) that enhance their ability to produce, such as the taxi driver's knowledge of the city's streets or the surgeon's knowledge of the human body. *Physical capital* consists of buildings, machinery, tools, and other manufactured items that are used to produce goods and services. Physical capital includes the driver's cab, the surgeon's scalpel, the ten-ton press used to print Newsweek, and the building where your economics class meets."

McEachern, W.A. (1991). *Economics: A contemporary introduction* (2nd ed.). Cincinnati, OH: South-Western, page 3.

Copying and changing a few words – Unacceptable paraphrasing

**Capital** signifies human products that are utilised in the creation of goods and services (McEachern, 1991). Human capital comprises knowledge and skills that people develop (through education and on-the-job training) to enhance their capacity to produce. In contrast, physical capital comprises buildings, machinery, tools, and other manufactured items that are utilised to produce goods and services (McEachern).

Although there is an attribution of the author's ideas in the parenthesized citation, few changes of words as (represents=signifies, creations=products, ability=capacity, etc) does not make it an acceptable paraphrase. However, the following version is acceptable because the writer puts his/her own comprehension framework in the paraphrased version without altering the entire meaning of the passage.

### *Acceptable Paraphrasing*

Capital is an economic concept referring to the things humans make, which are then used "in the production of goods and services" (McEachern, 1991, p. 3). This broad concept can be divided into human as well as physical capital, as McEachern illustrates. Indeed, human capital focuses on the products pertaining to individuals' skills and expertise, which function to improve individuals' production capacity. This type of capital can be gained through some form of education and/or training. In contrast, physical capital involves the kinds of tools and equipment, including buildings that are central to providing goods and services.

## **1.2. Guidelines for an effective paraphrasing**

(Adapted from Carolyn Wisniewski's "Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism," p. 22, and from the Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 564)

- Read through the passage several times, and use your own words, phrasing, and sentence structure to restate the idea.
- State what the text states and emphasize what the text emphasizes.
- Use synonyms for individual words and to rearrange the sentence structure.
- Expect your paraphrase to be about as long as, and possibly longer than, the original passage.
- If you are paraphrasing a technical source, you might need to keep jargon and technical phrases in your paraphrase.
- Use quotations only if using a certain synonym is awkward.
- Consider introducing the source before the paraphrased text. Then at the end of the paraphrase, give credit to your source by adding an appropriate citation. Provide a citation every time you paraphrase, even within the same paragraph.
- Reread the passage to make sure that you have included all the necessary information, to double check that your language does not coincide with that of the original, and to make sure that your paraphrase does not distort the source's meanings.

## **1.3. Practice**

### **Original passage:**

*Statements that seem complimentary in one context may be inappropriate in another. For example, women in business are usually uncomfortable if male colleagues or superiors compliment them on their appearance: the comments suggest that the women are being treated as visual decoration rather than as contributing workers. (p.*

323) ---Locker, K. O. (2003). *Business and administrative communication (6th ed.)*. St. Louis, MO: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.

- Let's first identify the important ideas in this passage:
  - Appropriateness of statements is situational.
  - Example is that working women may view compliments about appearance as offensive.
  - These compliments can be offensive because they may imply women are "decoration."
- Read the sample paraphrases below. For each of the paraphrases, determine if both wording and sentence structure were changed. Also check to see if all of the original points were included and if the original meaning was retained.

**Paraphrase A:**

*Words or expressions which appear favorable in one situation might be improper in a different situation. For instance, employed females are often uneasy when they are given positive comments on their looks. These remarks imply that the females are being viewed as adornment instead of as productive employees (Locker, 2003).*

[Although this paraphrase does a good job of changing the wording, it is not effective for two main reasons. First, it follows the sentence structure of the original passage too closely. Second, it fails to mention anything about "male colleagues or superiors." It also follows the same order or structure of ideas.]

**Paraphrase B:**

*Some statements may be inappropriate in one context, even though they are complimentary in another. Compliments by male colleagues or superiors regarding a female coworker's appearance, for example, often make the woman feel uncomfortable. Instead of treating the women as contributing workers, men obviously think of them as visual decoration (Locker, 2003).*

[While this paraphrase does a better job of changing the sentence structure, it also is ineffective. It uses too many of the words from the original passage. Further, it changes the meaning when it declares that "men obviously think of them as visual decoration." It also follows the same order or structure of ideas]

### **Paraphrase C:**

*Women may feel uneasy upon receiving ordinarily positive comments on their appearance from male coworkers or supervisors. To these women, the remarks carry an implied meaning: instead of being thought of as productive employees, they are actually being viewed as just a pretty part of the atmosphere. Depending on the situation, words or expressions which appear favorable may actually be unsuitable in a conversation (Locker, 2003).*

[This paraphrase is the most effective. In addition to changing both the wording and sentence structure, it includes all points and retains the meaning of the original passage. It also changes the order of ideas.]

## **2. Summarizing**

Students often feel lost in the details of long reading passages because of the large amount of information they encounter. As an effective writing strategy to draw up the main ideas out of the details, a summary enables students to shorten the text in their own words to perceive the greater picture.

### **2.1. Definition**

A summary is an overview on the main ideas of the original text. Following Bowker (2007: 12), summarizing involves selecting out some key features and then using those to create a shortened version of the author's prose. She suggests this example:

#### *Examples*

*"Children spend a very large proportion of their daily lives in school. They go there to learn, not only in a narrow academic sense, but in the widest possible interpretation of the word – about themselves, about being a person within a group of others, about the community in which they live, and about the world around them. Schools provide the setting in which such learning takes place."*

Leyden, S. (1985). *Helping the child of exceptional ability*. London: Croom Helm, page 38.

#### *Summaries*

##### *Author citation in the body of the sentence*

As Leyden (1985) points out, schools are places for children to learn about life, themselves, other people, as well as academic information.

##### *Author citation in brackets*

Schools are places for children to learn about life, themselves, other people, as well as academic information (Leyden, 1985).

The example shows that the summary is a simplified version of the text using different sentence structure and arrangement of ideas. However, some key words from the original version are used in the summary such as school, child, learn, academic in order to maintain the meaning of the original text.

## **2.2.Guidelines for writing a summary**

A good summary is the one that constructs a shortened version in different phrasing and keep the information of the original text. Hucker (2009: 352) lists these guidelines to write an effective summary.

- In the first sentence, mention the title of the text, the name of the author, and the author's thesis or the visual's central point.
- Maintain a neutral tone; be objective.
- Use the third-person point of view and the present tense: Taylor argues.
- Keep your focus on the text. Don't state the author's ideas as if they were your own.
- Put all or most of your summary in your own words; if you borrow a phrase or a sentence from the text, put it in quotation marks and give the page number in parentheses.
- Limit yourself to presenting the text's key points.
- Be concise; make every word count.

Summarizing a text indicates the writer's understanding of the key ideas of the original text.

## **2.3. Practice**

### **1. Original text**

Since the time of Descartes, it is estimated that no fewer than five hundred attempts have been made to create artificial languages for international use. The most successful by far has been Esperanto, a language constructed around the end of the nineteenth century by Dr. Zamenhof of Poland. Esperanto is a language that is extremely easy to learn and speak, with its words drawn mainly from English, German, the Romance languages, Latin and Greek. (Pel, p. 75)

### *The Outline*

- Many artificial languages have been made.
- Esperanto is the most successful one.
- Constructed by Zamenhof around the 19th century.
- Easy to learn and speak
- Based on E, G, the Romance, L and Gr. in terms of vocabulary

### *Summary:*

*Of the many artificial languages that have been developed, Esperanto, invented by Zamenhof about 1900, has been the most successful. Easy to learn and speak, its vocabulary comes mainly from Western European languages, Latin, and Greek. (Pel, p. 75)*

## **2. Original text**

For generations, Americans have researched their pasts to discover who their ancestors were. In recent years, many more people have developed an avid interest in their genealogy and the cultural heritage of their ancestors. This interest was sparked for two reasons. First, Americans celebrated the bicentennial of the United States in 1976 and paid tribute to this country's history. Second, and more recently, the book *Roots*, which traces the family history of an American black man named Alex Haley back to Africa, was serialized on national television. As a result of these two events, a new pastime for thousands of Americans was created.

### *The Outline*

American research into background

- Ancestors
- Cultural heritage

Reasons for research

- Bicentennial celebration –
- Roots

*Summary:*

*Recently, many Americans have become interested in researching their backgrounds in order to identify their ancestors and learn about their cultural heritage. This interest in genealogy began with the U.S. Bicentennial celebration and intensified with the televising of the family history of Alex Haley, a black American.*

**References**

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**Practice on paraphrasing and summarizing**

- Paraphrase and summarize this original passage in the space provided below.

**Original Passage**

Language is the main means of communication between peoples. But so many different languages have developed that language has often been a barrier rather than an aid to understanding among peoples. For many years, people have dreamed of setting up an international universal language which all people could speak and understand. The arguments in favor of a universal language are simple and obvious. If all peoples spoke the same tongue, cultural and economic ties might be much closer, and good will might increase between countries (Kispert).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kispert, Robert J. "Universal language." World Book Online Reference Center. 2004. World Book, Inc. 13 Nov. 2004 <<http://www.worldbookonline.com/wb/Article?id=ar576960>>.