

PARAPHRASING DOs AND DON'Ts

When starting a university course, or preparing to take an academic-level test, or planning to carry out research, we critically need to acquire or develop skills for academic study. In particular, these skills include learning to read and write efficiently.

Reading and writing for academic purposes is not easy even for native users of a language, not to mention learners of that language. Academic writing is the most complicated of all language skills, which requires a distinct purpose, readability, clarity of thought and direction, good organisation, and grammatical acceptability. It is ever more challenging because you should fight the temptation to plagiarise. Academic reading includes passages, articles and books written in a variety of different styles, such as argumentative, descriptive, narrative, discursive, etc.; it requires that you know general reading strategies such as scanning for clues as to where the information might be found, skimming through the text fairly quickly to get the gist, careful reading of important passages, paraphrasing and summarising.

The focal point of this paper is the skill of paraphrasing, which is exceptionally helpful for academic purposes. Our goal is to help students of English to make use of this skill appropriately to read and write efficiently, as well as to avoid plagiarism. The paper overviews common paraphrasing strategies that have proved beneficial to cope with the reading and writing tasks on standardised tests, such as the TOEFL IBT, IELTS and the like. It also warns against the common paraphrasing errors that test-takers make. The article is based on the results of practical work with individuals preparing for these tests.

What is paraphrasing and why is it essential?

“A paraphrase is a rewording of another writer’s text, explanation, argument, or narrative.” /Trupe, 2005/. In other words, it means expressing someone else’s idea in a different way by using your own words and structures.

Paraphrasing skills may serve various purposes. First and foremost, if the passage is too long, paraphrasing helps summarise it, clarifying and simplifying information at the same time. In this respect, paraphrasing is often confused with summarising, because they both perform similar functions. However, it is more accurate to see paraphrasing as integral part of summarising, a skill that makes summarising possible. In fact, a summary is a short version of the original text. As *The Bedford Reader* puts it /Kennedy et al., 2003: 52-53/, it is used to condense *big pieces of writing* into a few lines that still convey the core meaning of the source, whereas a paraphrase restates a *single statement*. Most summaries should be about a third of the original length. In contrast, a paraphrase is about the same length as the original. In both techniques, however, the resulting statement or text should be substantially different from the source in wording and sentence structure.

Other reasons to employ paraphrasing skills are: giving expert evidence for a point you are making in your own argumentative essay, or presenting an opposing point of view that you wish to refute, or citing a quotation indirectly. Still there are a number of other motives to apply paraphrasing skills such as, for example, to adapt the language of a report to your target audience (if it is difficult to understand), or change the register of the writing (from formal to informal or vice versa). Moreover, on standardised tests such as the TOEFL IBT and IELTS, paraphrasing can be particularly useful, as it helps to recognise and match the ideas in the questions with the similar ideas expressed both in the reading and listening material. A characteristic example of a task that tests the aptitude for paraphrasing is a reading skill on the TOEFL IBT which requires that test-takers match long and complex sentences with their simplified restatements that contain the core meaning of the original.

Paraphrasing not only prevents unnecessary repetition and plagiarism when writing an essay, but also assists in creating sentence cohesion. Effective communication means more than just communicating facts, opinions and arguments. The parts of both oral and written discourse must blend with each other to be a single uninterrupted piece, in which every word-combination, every sentence (and every paragraph) contributes to the whole meaning. Hence it is vital to make your spoken and

written word cohesive. Indeed, rephrasing of key words and phrases is a helpful technique for this purpose.

There are four common errors that most learners make when paraphrasing. Firstly, they tend to shorten the source, not being able to replace some of the words or ideas; secondly, for the same reason, they are inclined to plagiarising; thirdly, they distort the meaning, which shows that they either have misunderstood the original idea or have chosen the inappropriate synonyms; and finally, they merge their own opinion with the original idea rather than paraphrase it. To avoid these problems, one should adhere to the effective strategies of paraphrasing, which will be discussed in detail further in this paper.

Thus, the golden rules, or dos and don'ts of paraphrasing are as follows:

- ✓ Use synonyms;
- ✓ Use compensatory strategies;
- ✓ Change the sentence structure;
- ✓ Cite the source when you can't paraphrase.
- ✓ **DON'T** leave out information;
- ✓ **DON'T** plagiarise;
- ✓ **DON'T** change the original meaning;
- ✓ **DON'T** include your own opinion.

Choosing synonyms correctly

One principle of paraphrasing is to use synonyms. Synonyms are different words that carry similar meanings (e.g., *talk*, *chat* and *speak*). Because synonyms display semantic variety, they can make both oral and written language more attention-grabbing. It should be noted, however, that synonyms are only similar, but not always identical, in their meanings. To quote dictionary editor L. Urdang /Urdang, 1982: 7/, "It is not always simple to make fine distinctions among meanings of words, for the meaning of a word is the sum total of all of the instances of the word's use in the language". Each word in a synonymous set carries a slightly different sense of the same core meaning. These characteristics become especially obvious in certain contexts. For instance, you can describe a girl as *thin*, *slim* or *slender*, but you can hardly use "*slim*" or "*slender*" to describe someone's face.

It is good to expand vocabulary also for stylistic reasons. Speech will be much more exciting and versatile if one avoids repeating the same words. Using synonyms is one way to demonstrate rich vocabulary knowledge. However, standardised exams test not only an applicant's vocabulary but also his or her ability to make appropriate word choices. Users of the English language must acknowledge and appreciate the shades of difference that exist among the words having the same or close denotational meaning and learn to choose the precisely suitable word for a particular purpose. Words are coloured by such peripheral aspects of meaning as connotations, implications, and applications. **Connotations** suggest an additional meaning or meanings for a word. Connotations emerge as a result of various factors, such as etymology, as well as historical and literary associations, which are not known to non-native speakers. **Implications** are usually minor ideas involved in the meaning of a word. And last but not least, **applications**, or peculiarities of usage, are the restrictions on a word's use in the verbal or written discourse. In other words, a group of synonyms properly belonging together may have characteristics that are slightly different, either as to level of usage, appropriateness, or the grammatical or syntactic contexts in which they are found.

Synonyms are not always interchangeable also for another reason. It is about the way words are grouped together in the English language. Such groups are referred to as **collocations**. In order to use a word naturally, test-takers need to learn what words often combine with it. In different languages, we use different collocations. For example, in English it is natural to say: *a big mistake (NOT a large mistake)*, *a serious injury (NOT a grave injury)*, *strong coffee (NOT robust coffee)*, *a firm handshake (NOT a hard handshake)*, *get on a boat (NOT sit into a boat)*, *take action (NOT make an action)*, *bitterly/greatly/deeply disappointed (NOT strongly disappointed)*.

The appropriate use of synonyms makes the speech eloquent and articulate. The technique of rephrasing and repetition of key words and phrases relies on the writer's proficiency in synonyms. The following examples illustrate how to rephrase and repeat words and ideas and, at the same time, not to be accused of unnecessary repetition:

The lawyer made a *short **statement***. His remarks were quite brief.

I *am happy* you have the *opportunity* to go there. It pleases me that you have been given such a chance.

The most important characteristic in a friend is *honesty*. If someone is a friend, then he or she must be honest. I can trust someone only if he or she is truthful. If a friend of mine does not tell me the truth, then he or she can no longer be considered a friend /Phillips, 2008: 499-500/.

We see from the examples above that the technique involves not only word substitution but changes in sentence structure and, consequently, in parts of speech. In this way, key words and phrases are not simply repeated but rather restated. The strategy of restating sentences will be discussed later in this paper. We can also observe that not every word is worth being repeated; a skillful writer should recognise key words, the ones that bridge ideas between sentences and focus the attention of a listener/reader on central ideas. On the contrary, repetition of words and phrases of secondary importance should be avoided. Instead, they should be replaced with pronouns and other substitutional words.

Using compensatory strategies

Compensatory strategies are ones that can help out in “desperate” or “critical” situations. When we forget a synonym of a word on the spur of the moment, there are three simple but constructive means to use /Sharpe, 2006: 92/. One option is to substitute adjectives for their opposites with the negative particle *not*. For example, “The book was boring” can be replaced by “The book was not very interesting.” Comparative adjectives with *more* or *-er* can be rephrased with *less* or *no more + antonym*, as in “This hotel is cheaper.” → “This hotel is less / no more expensive”. Secondly, verbs with specific meaning can be replaced with more generic verbs, like “encourage” → “help”. The next method is *description* or *explanation*. It is most appropriate for rephrasing nouns. For instance, the term “short-sightedness” can be replaced by “inability to see distant objects clearly”.

These strategies can compensate for words that suddenly slip your mind when you are speaking or writing. They are not usually separated as focal in the paraphrasing practice. Nonetheless, we find it more reasonable to include them in our list of dos and don'ts.

Changing sentence structure

As has been mentioned above, it is not enough to replace words with their synonyms or rephrase key ideas repeatedly to make a sentence into a good paraphrase. A paraphrased idea must be a restatement of the original one; meanwhile, it must be different not only in vocabulary but in its syntactic structure as well. Only if you use both synonyms and alternative structures will your statement be considered an appropriate paraphrase. In this way, you will also meet another requirement on the test – you will demonstrate syntactic variety. Moreover, a proficient use of synonymous words in combination with syntactic change will enhance the effect on the reader/listener. As a matter of fact, synonymy exists not only between words and word-groups, but also between sentences. Changing a sentence structure roughly means writing a synonymous sentence.

There are numerous practical ways of restating sentences to provide syntactic change. The key is to read and listen for meaning, rather than go for separate words. TOEFL teaching expert Pamela Sharpe suggests the following strategies: chronology, cause, concession, coordination, comparison, negatives, and passives /Sharpe, 2006: 95/. As the terms imply, the first three strategies make use of respective complex sentences of time, cause and concession; coordination is based on the use of coordinate expressions such as *not only... but also*, *neither ... nor* and the like; comparison employs degrees of comparison, as well as words showing similarity and contrast; negatives rely on negative words and prefixes; and lastly, passives imply changing the voice of the original sentence.

We find a variety of other alternative structures and techniques to be useful in paraphrasing practice. These include cleft sentences, inversion, participle and relative clauses. Moreover, there are simpler methods, such as changing parts of speech. Compare “The number of the car owners has risen considerably” with “The graph shows a considerable increase / rise in the number of owners” , or “Living in a city is more exciting than living in a village” with “Life in a village is less stimulating than life in a city.” In fact, the latter sentence pair is an example of using a combination of various means, namely, of parts of speech and negative comparative structures with antonyms.

Citing the source

One of the commonest mistakes that students make when writing research papers is leaving out the source of the statements and arguments that they cite in their work. Certainly, paraphrasing is an extremely useful technique to avoid using quotation marks all the way through; however, it is appropriate to cite the source even if you do not use a direct quotation of the author's ideas but paraphrase them. Otherwise, you can be accused of plagiarising.

Thus, when you paraphrase an authority's evidence, the gist should be introduced in your own words, but it should be made clear that you are presenting another author's ideas. In writing, the following expressions can be used to introduce the source:

- ✓ M. Johnson claims/argues/points out that ...
- ✓ According to A. Right, the famous medical researcher, ...
- ✓ According to political scientist V. Brown, ...

On the contrary, if the author's exact words are used to quote important ideas, they have to be enclosed in quotation marks. This can be done with the expressions above, as well as wording like these:

- ✓ In the words of Professor Thomson, "..."
- ✓ To quote medical researcher Harris, "..."
- ✓ As language specialist Dr W. R. Lee puts it, "..."

When producing an argumentative essay for a test, it is sufficient to use the above methods of citing the source. However, more detailed referencing is required for research papers. In that case, references (including the author's surname, date of publication of the source and page numbers in brackets) should be made within the text.

To sum up, the technique of paraphrasing is crucial in all aspects of academic English. It serves a great range of purposes, including summarising, clarifying or simplifying information, preventing plagiarism, creating sentence cohesion, and attaching expressiveness to the speech. Providing that the fundamental rules of paraphrasing are followed, one can achieve fluency, eloquence and persuasiveness in his or her productive language skills, as well as enhance receptive abilities on standardised tests.

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Մ. ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ – Հետևողական վերածնակերպման սկզբունքները. – Ակադեմիական չափանիշների համար հաճախ անհրաժեշտ է լինում օգտագործել վերածնակերպման հմտությունները: Վերածնակերպումը նշանակում է արտահայտության ձևակերպման փոփոխություն, որն իրականացվում է խոսքն այլ բառերով և շարահյուսական կառույցներով արտահայտելու օգնությամբ: Տվյալ մեթոդը կիրառվում է տեքստի սեղմացման և պարզաբանման համար, ինչպես նաև ստանդարտ թեստերի առաջադրանքների վրա աշխատելիս: Վերածնակերպումը օգնում է էսսե գրելու ընթացքում խուսափել գրագողությունից, նպաստում է ստեղծվող խոսքի տրամաբանությանը և վեր է հանում սովորողի հարուստ բառապաշարը: Հոդվածում ներկայացվում են հետևողական վերածնակերպման սկզբունքները և այդ մեթոդի օգտագործմանը բնորոշ սխալները:

М. КАРАПЕТЯН – Принципы эффективного перефразирования.
– Для академических целей очень часто приходится использовать навыки перефразирования. Перефразирование заключается в изменении формулировки высказывания, в выражении чужой речи другими словами и с помощью других синтаксических структур. В частности, данный метод применяется для краткого изложения, прояснения и

упрощения информации. Метод чрезвычайно эффективен также для работы над тестовыми заданиями чтения и аудирования в стандартных тестах, а именно при сопоставлении вопросов с эквивалентным текстовым материалом. Перефразирование также помогает избежать плагиата при написании эссе, способствует логической связанности произведенного текста и, что немаловажно, является показателем богатого словарного запаса учащегося. В статье рассматриваются принципы эффективного перефразирования и типичные ошибки, совершаемые при использовании этого метода.