

# Paraphrasing

This resource introduces paraphrasing as a critical academic practice and provides examples to help you recognise what makes a good and bad paraphrase.

## WHAT IS A PARAPHRASE?

To paraphrase is to **'reword' text**, so that the content information stays the same while other aspects of the communication are changed. From a learning perspective, paraphrasing is really the nuts and bolts of information 'processing', done as part of taking notes or drafting new text. It is the opposite of mindlessly copying information. It's core to the business of developing a personal understanding of something, as well as avoiding plagiarism. Plagiarism is not only about failing to acknowledge a source of information; it's also about failing to make sense of information in relation to a new purpose and context.

Being able to paraphrase well is a challenging and creative part of academic writing. Doing it well demonstrates:

- you have a sound understanding of the original source
- you have credibility as an independent intellect
- you are proficient and flexible in your use of English.

In contrast to a summary, which would be far shorter than the original text, a paraphrase might be the same length, or longer. What defines a good paraphrase is not the length, but the degree to which the original text has been reworded and referenced effectively and appropriately to accurately convey the original meaning and source in the context of the paraphraser's argument.

## Why is paraphrasing difficult?

Paraphrasing is often much more difficult than summarising, as paraphrasing requires you to reword the original text while still retaining the meaning and relating the information in the context of your writing.

If you don't paraphrase well, you might risk altering the meaning of the original text. For example:

**Original text** (from Jagtenberg & D'Alton's *Four Dimensional Social Space*)

The education system has performed, on an even wider scale, a major task of social control, training the growing workforce in the discipline and work style necessary in a capitalist economy, and systematically conveying 'acceptable' — i.e. safe — social attitudes to the rising generations.

**Bad paraphrasing attempt – misrepresenting the original meaning**

According to Jagtenberg and D'Alton (1988), the education system is the major form of control in a capitalist economy.

Note that in this paraphrase the use of 'the major form of control' overstates and therefore misrepresents the argument in the original text.

Also, if your paraphrase is too close to the original, it is considered plagiarised. For example:

**Bad paraphrasing attempt – close paraphrase**

According to Jagtenberg and D'Alton (1988), the education system has performed social control in a capitalist society: training the growing workforce and work style, and teaching 'acceptable' social attitudes for the young generations.

Note that this paraphrase closely follows the structure of the original text and includes many of its phrases, and thus, can be considered plagiarism.

## HOW DO I PARAPHRASE?

While there are a number of techniques you can use to put something into your own words, such as changing the sentence structure and noun phrases and using appropriate synonyms, the most important thing you need to focus on are the key ideas that you wish to convey to support your argument.

You can paraphrase a text in many different ways, depending on which idea or concept from the original text you want to use to support your argument. In the examples below, the **underlined part** is the main idea of each paraphrase.



**Original** (from Spiro's *Tax Policy and the Underground Economy*)

*One of the considerations that is all too often ignored in discussions of tax policy is the way it affects the underground economy. Theoretical tax models almost always assume that everybody follows the rules. In reality, the behavioural response to tax changes has a wider range of variation than the choice between labour and leisure. Many otherwise honest citizens are prepared to break the law in order to evade taxes. Once the underground economy is taken into account – in effect, the proposition that individuals may decide to “opt out” of the tax system – there is a whole new layer of complexity to tax policy. Taxes that may seem to be optimal without the underground economy may no longer be optimal once it is taken into consideration.*

**Example Paraphrase**

1. The underground economy is heavily influenced by tax policy. This is, however, often neglected by theoretical tax models, who usually assume that everyone follows the rule. In fact, as responses to tax changes vary, many honest citizens are prepared to commit tax crime (Spiro, 2013).
2. According to Spiro (2013), even honest citizens are likely to break the law to evade taxes when faced with changes in tax policy, as responses to tax changes vary between individuals. Despite this, many theoretical tax models often neglect the importance of the effect of tax policy change over the economy.
3. Spiro, in *Tax Policy and the Underground Economy* (2013), argues that theoretical tax models are wrong to overlook the effect that tax policy has on the underground economy because they unrealistically assume that every taxpayer follows the rules. In fact, different people respond differently to tax changes, and many may even commit tax crime when faced with such a problem.

Note in these examples, the key message to be conveyed from the original text is captured in the opening sentence or phrase.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

Note Taking

Concept Mapping

Literature Review

Essay Writing

## REFERENCES

Jagtenberg, T & D’Alton, P 1988, *Four Dimensional Social Space*, Harper & Row, Sydney.

Spiro, P 2013, ‘Tax Policy and the Underground Economy’, in C Bajada & F Schneider (eds.), *The Shadow Economy: An International Survey*, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

