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Paraphrasing & Plagiarism

Part 2: Preparing a Paraphrase

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I'm Nigel Caplan, ESL Specialist at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. This is the second video in a three-part series on paraphrasing and avoiding plagiarism.

You will be able to follow this presentation better if you click the ZOOM icon – that's the PLUS key above the powerpoint slide in the top right corner.

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Paraphrasing & (Avoiding) Plagiarism

- Part 1: Using Sources
- Part 2: Preparing a paraphrase/summary
- Part 3: Writing the paraphrase/summary

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In the first video, I tried to define paraphrasing and plagiarism and showed you different types of reference. I recommended that you find out how, why, and where sources are used in the actual writing you will be doing.

In this presentation, we will work together through a sample text, and I'll show you some of the language choices you can make when preparing a good paraphrase or summary. And then in part 3, we'll actually write a summary and make sure that is acceptable and not plagiarized.

You can find all the videos on the Writing Center's ESL pages, and there's a clickable link under the video.

Paraphrase or Plagiarism?

- You can't use the original phrasing
- A paraphrase *looks* different
- A citation is not enough
- Don't "translate" a few words
- Write your own sentence

In video 3, I'll talk more about acceptable paraphrases versus plagiarism, but let's start here with a few principles: you can't use the phrasing of the original source in your paraphrase. This doesn't mean you can't use *any* words from the original, but it does mean that a paraphrase must look different from the source in its structure and word choice. If you need to use the original phrasing, use a quotation, as I explained in video 1.

Next, you need to understand that using a citation does not protect you from plagiarism. If you use the same words or phrasing as your source without quotation marks but with a citation, it is still not acceptable in most disciplines and genres in American academic English. Equally, it is not sufficient to just translate a few words by replacing them with synonyms, or cutting and pasting parts of different sentences together.

Fundamentally, a good paraphrase is your own sentence.

Your own sentence?

- The flow of information
- The stance (opinions, attitudes)
- The level of detail

Based on Hood (2008)

But, what does it mean to write your own sentence, as opposed to essentially the same sentence as the original? Consider these three decisions which you make in anything you write:

What is the flow of information? Where are the main ideas and how are they related? The information structure of the original fits that paper, but it probably won't fit yours in the same way. You need to organize the information to match your needs.

What stance are you taking? That is, what is your opinion or attitude? The original writer probably had a stance, so you need to decide if and how you will report that, as well as *your* stance toward the source material.

Finally, how much detail do you need in your text? Is it the same level of detail as in the original?

This is why academic writers mostly use paraphrases, summaries, and generalizations rather than direct quotations: they need sentences for their paper, not their source's.

An Example

“All Aboard for Graduate School.”

Nature Structural & Molecular Biology, **13**, 753 (2006)

[click the link under the video](#)

Abstract: Graduate school can be an intimidating journey to undertake. Luckily, there are plenty of sources of advice to help you on the way.

Reprinted by permission from *Nature Structural & Molecular Biology*, **13**, 753. “All aboard for graduate School.”
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As an example, I’m going to show how you might prepare to write a summary of a short editorial from a *Nature* journal. The link is under the video – it might only work if you’re on the network of a university that subscribes to *Nature*. If not, hopefully there’s enough context here to understand the techniques. For copyright reasons, I can’t reproduce the entire text here, but this is the title and abstract.

“All Aboard for Graduate School.”

Abstract: Graduate school can be an intimidating journey to undertake. Luckily, there are plenty of sources of advice to help you on the way.

<http://www.nature.com/nsmb/journal/v13/n9/full/nsmb0906-753.html>

Imagine that we’re writing a handbook for new international graduate students at our university. One section will contain will be called “Advice for Surviving your Degree” and will draw on several sources, including this one. So, we’re going to summarize this article and use it in our handbook.

1. Read the text!

- Pause the video
- Read the article carefully
- Decide
 - What is it about?
 - How can you use it in *your* text?

So, the first step of course is to read the text carefully. If you can access the article, you can pause the video using the controls under my head and read the whole editorial before we continue. As you read, take notes on these two questions: what is the article about? And how can we use it in the text we are writing?

2. Look for the BIG PICTURE

- What is the **macro theme**? – the sentence(s) that guide the whole article?

“So, does the PhD really have to be a trial by fire or are there sources of advice available?”

- Check the **abstract**:

Graduate school can be an intimidating journey to undertake. Luckily, there are plenty of sources of advice to help you on the way.

The next stage is to ask what the text is really about. What is the big picture? Here you’re looking for the sentences that guide the whole article, which we sometimes call the macro theme – macro meaning big, or overall. In this case, the macro theme is the question: “So, does the PhD really have to be a trial by fire or are there sources of advice available?” The abstract should also contain the macro theme, and you can see the phrase “sources of advice” repeated. So, we know that the editorial contains several sources of advice for graduate students.

3. Divide into stages

- What are the main sections in the source?
- What are the steps in the argument?
- Pay attention to the beginnings of paragraphs.
- ... and the ends of sentences.

Now, divide the source text into stages. By stages, I mean the main sections or the major steps in the argument. This article doesn't really have an argument, but it does have five clear stages, each with a different source of advice.

This text is relatively easy to divide because each paragraph (if you exclude the intro and conc) represents one stage. But in longer texts, it's common for a stage to be developed over several paragraphs. To help break up the text, pay special attention to the beginnings of paragraphs, where writers often announce the theme of the coming section, as well as to the ends of sentences, where the new, important information usually appears.

4. Summarize the themes

- Circle the key words in each stage:
 - ¶2: *advice and self-help books, tomes, source, texts, journals, columns*
 - ¶3: *e-help, Nature, career magazine, website, archives, articles, Science, links, actual URLs*
- Choose words to summarize the theme of each stage:
 - Books / Online journals / Blogs / Peer interaction / Mentors

The next step is to summarize the themes of the text – that is the topic of each stage. To do this, circle the key words in each stage. I’ve shown you the words I found in paragraphs 2 and 3, which are the first two stages. You’re probably looking at nouns for the main ideas.

¶2: *advice and self-help books, tomes, source, texts, journals, columns*

¶3: *e-help, Nature, career magazine, website, archives, articles, Science, links, actual URLs*

Then, choose one or two words to summarize the theme of each stage. These words could be from the source – remember it’s OK to use some original words – or they might be other words you know which cover all the terms in the paragraphs. So, for stage 1, I’ve chosen “books” from the text, but stage 2 I’ve chosen “online journals”, because that’s the real focus here. I’ve summarized the other stages as blogs, peer interaction (that’s my term) and mentors.

5. Describe the organization

- How does information flow in the original?
- What is the sequence of stages?
- Why?
- Will it work for *your* text?

Now, think about the way that information flows in the original article. What is the order of the ideas? why has the writer chosen that sequence, and will it work for your writing? In other words, would it help you to change the organization to fit the flow of your paper?

To describe the organization this article, we actually need to consider another aspect of the essay: stance.

6. Analyze the stance

- Attitudes and opinions of the writer

Books: *not everyone's cup of tea, for those who prefer to read all about it, useful*

Online journals: *of course, there is also; topics range as widely as; useful, interesting*

Blogs: *different take on things, that virtual planet, be warned, interesting, practical, poignant*

Peer interaction: *of course, help, allowing, useful, good, even*

Mentors: *there is no substitute for, obvious, with any luck, valuable, absolutely invaluable, vital, successful, help, fantastic, ideally, good*

Stance refers to the attitudes and opinions of the writer of the source text (see Hood 2008 for more). Most writers – except in very factual writing and some journalism – take a stance on their subject, and it's important to recognize the stance for two reasons: you might choose to comment on it in your summary, and you also need to decide if you share the writer's stance, or if you are going to take a different stance.

I've pulled out the words that mark the writer's stance in the article. As you look through this list, you should see that the words become increasingly positive: it is clear that the writer doesn't find the first stage (advice books) very useful, whereas the last stage (mentoring) is presented in very strongly approving terms (absolutely invaluable, vital, fantastic).

So, I would conclude that the sources of advice in this article are organized in order of the writer's evaluation of their usefulness, from least useful to most useful. That's OK for an article, but for a handbook, what about starting with the most important/useful advice and going down? (This will also help avoid plagiarism). In other cases, it is better to follow the organization of the original.

Now is a good time to decide your stance: do you agree with this advice, or do you think the author is unfair to some sources of advice and too positive about others? For the purposes of this example, I'm going to be more skeptical about blogs and recommend journal websites more highly.

7. Choose your level of detail

- Which ideas and details are important for *your* text?

Finally, you need to choose the level of detail you will include in your paraphrase or summary.

This means you have to decide which points and examples are important for your text: they may be useful in the original, but your text is different. In this example, our text is a handbook, whereas the original is an editorial in a scientific journal.

Summaries contain fewer details than the original, but you still have to communicate about the same information. There are several language strategies which allow you to do this and make good choices about your own writing.

Changing the level of detail

a) Use a classifying word:

- “fellow labmates—post-docs, graduate students and technicians”
 - *Nature, Science* → online scientific journals
 - “Many universities help graduate students to meet both in social arenas and in journal clubs and student seminar series.”
- Graduate student social and study groups

These techniques are adapted from Hood (2008) and Frodesen & Wald (2010)

The first is to use a classifying word – that’s a bigger term which covers a series of specific examples in the text. So, there’s an example in the article of “fellow labmates” which is the classifying term for “post-docs, graduate students, and technicians.” We could also replace the references to specific journals (*Nature, Science*) with the classifying term “online scientific journals.” Or, this long sentence :“Many universities help graduate students to meet both in social arenas and in journal clubs and student seminar series” with “graduate student social and study groups.” In each case, we have reduced the level of detail so we are including less information, but hopefully still capturing the essence of the text. You can write these words in your notes or in the margin of the article.

Changing the level of detail

b) Use a more abstract, general word

- “professor/post-doc/self-help guide/scientific society or scientific journal” → **professionals**
- “you should also look for people with the time, energy and interest”
→ **people who are willing and able**

A similar trick is to look for words that are more abstract and therefore more general. So, we could summarize “professor/post-doc/self-help guide/scientific society or scientific journal” in para 1 as “professionals” or “experts.” These words describe a common characteristic rather than a specific person or group.

Another example is this advice: “you should also look for people with the time, energy and interest” , which is fairly concrete. You could paraphrase this as “people who are willing and able.” Notice that in changing the nouns to adjectives, you are completely changing the grammar of the sentence, which is helpful in a paraphrase. We’ll look at this point in more depth and consider other strategies for summarizing without plagiarizing in part 3 of this series.

7 Steps

1. Read the text
2. Look for the big picture (macro theme)
3. Divide into stages
4. Summarize the themes
5. Describe the organization
6. Analyze the stance
7. Choose your level of detail

Source: based on Hood (2008) and for #4, 6 especially, Frodesen & Wald (2010)

Here again are the 7 steps for preparing a paraphrase or summary:

1. Read the text
2. Look for the big picture (macro theme)
3. Divide into stages
4. Summarize the themes
5. Describe the organization
6. Analyze the stance
7. Choose your level of detail

Conclusion

- Not re-writing a source in your own words
- Using the source in your own text
- Control: flow, stance, and level of details

References (download the handout to read in full)

"All aboard for graduate school." (2006). *Nature Structural & Molecular Biology*, **13**, 753.

Frodesen J., and Wald, M. (2010). Transforming texts: Vocabulary for extended summaries. Paper presented at the TESOL Convention. Available from http://writing.berkeley.edu/users/mwald/tesol10_panel.html

Hood, S. (2008). Summary writing: implicating meaning in processes of change. *Linguistics and Education*, **19**, 351-365.

To wrap up, paraphrasing and summary writing should not simply be seen as re-writing a source in your own words. Instead, they mean using the source in *your* text, and you do that by understanding, controlling, and changing the flow, stance, and level of details.

In the final video in this series, I'll model how I would write a summary of the graduate school article that we've been looking at here.

If you'd like to follow up on any of my references, please download the PDF of these slides from the Writing Center website.



Website: www.unc.edu/writingcenter/esl
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Thank you for watching this presentation. Please take a moment to complete a quick evaluation survey. Link under the video.

I'm Nigel Caplan in the Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill. Join me again for part 3 of paraphrasing and plagiarism.