I’m Nigel Caplan, ESL Specialist at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. This is the final video in our 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.
In the first video, I tried to define paraphrasing and plagiarism and showed you different ways to use sources. I recommended that you find out how, why, and where sources are used in your fields and genres. In part 2, I took you through 7 steps for preparing a paraphrase or summary so that it is acceptable and appropriate for your own paper.

In this presentation, we will write a summary of the graduate school advice article that we saw in part 2.

You can find all the videos on the Writing Center’s ESL pages.
Let’s go back to the original question in part 1, what is plagiarism? You’ll recall that there is no single definition, but for most people, the key principle is that you must not represent another person’s words or ideas as your own. In a paraphrase or summary, you don’t generally use quotations, which means you can’t use exactly the same words or phrasing as the original.

This means that a good paraphrase will accurately represent the ideas in the source, although as we saw in part 2, it will not usually contain the same level of detail, organization, or even stance as the original. The paraphrase is written in your own words, and does not use the same wording and phrasing as the source text. And finally, the paraphrase must be cited correctly according to the conventions that govern the discipline and genre in which you are writing. If you need help with citations, ask your librarian: they are the experts!
Although advice and self-help books are not everyone's cup of tea, there are a number of tomes out there for those who prefer to read all about it. [...] These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. In addition, the Science and Nature journals publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students, so it's often useful to glance over the first half of their tables of contents.

“All Aboard for Graduate School.” Copyright 2006. doi:10.1038/nsmb0906-753

We’re going to work on the editorial from Nature again – the link is under the video of my head. Again, you might only be able to see the full text if you are on the network of a university that subscribes to the journal.

To demonstrate the difference between paraphrasing and plagiarism, let's look at a few sentences from the article. “Although advice and self-help books are not everyone's cup of tea, there are a number of tomes out there for those who prefer to read all about it. [...] These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. In addition, the Science and Nature journals publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students, so it's often useful to glance over the first half of their tables of contents.”
Example 1 – OK?

There are a number of advice and self-help books out there. These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. *Science* and *Nature* journals also publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students.

SOURCE: Although advice and self-help books are not everyone’s cup of tea, there are a number of tomes out there for those who prefer to read all about it. [...] These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. In addition, the *Science* and *Nature* journals publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students, so it's often useful to glance over the first half of their tables of contents.

Here is an example of a paraphrase of that passage. As I read it, decide if you consider it an acceptable paraphrase or not.

There are a number of advice and self-help books out there. These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. *Science* and *Nature* journals also publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students.

You can pause the video if you’d like time to compare it to the original (in blue).
Most American readers would agree that this is not acceptable in academic writing. All the words and phrases in red are directly repeated from the original and occur in exactly the same order. There is also no citation, and the writer has made no effort to acknowledge the source. Even though the writer has taken phrases selectively from the original, rather than copying the whole paragraph, this would be considered plagiarized, certainly in a US academic context.

**Example 1 – NOT OK**

There are a number of advice and self-help books out there. These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. *Science* and *Nature* journals also publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students.

SOURCE: Although advice and self-help books are not everyone’s cup of tea, there are a number of tomes out there for those who prefer to read all about it. [...] These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. In addition, the *Science* and *Nature* journals publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students, so it’s often useful to glance over the first half of their tables of contents.
Example 2 – OK?

A 2006 editorial in Nature recommended a number of advice and self-help books for people who like reading. These books discuss topics from selecting a laboratory to cooking for your dissertation committee. Furthermore, the Science and Nature publications include articles on themes of value to doctoral students; thus it’s frequently helpful to look at the first items on the contents page.

SOURCE: Although advice and self-help books are not everyone’s cup of tea, there are a number of tomes out there for those who prefer to read all about it. [...] These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. In addition, the Science and Nature journals publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students, so it’s often useful to glance over the first half of their tables of contents.

Here’s another example. Again, do you think it’s a acceptable paraphrase?

A 2006 editorial in Nature recommended a number of advice and self-help books for people who like reading. These books discuss topics from selecting a laboratory to cooking for your dissertation committee. Furthermore, the Science and Nature publications include articles on themes of value to doctoral students; thus it’s frequently helpful to look at the first items on the contents page.

Pause the video if you’d like more time to read it.
Example 2 – NOT OK

A 2006 editorial in *Nature* recommended a number of advice and self-help books for people who like reading. These books discuss topics from selecting a laboratory to cooking for your dissertation committee. Furthermore, the *Science* and *Nature* publications include articles on themes of value to doctoral students; thus it’s frequently helpful to look at the first items on the contents page.

SOURCE: Although advice and self-help books are not everyone’s cup of tea, there are a number of tomes out there for those who prefer to read all about it. [...] These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. In addition, the *Science* and *Nature* journals publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students, so it’s often useful to glance over the first half of their tables of contents.

The problem with this attempt is that the paraphrase only differs from the original in vocabulary by using various synonyms. For example, if you compare the sentences in red, you can see that the paraphrase is basically the same sentence with similar words: books instead of texts, discuss not cover, topics not issues, etc.

Although the writer has acknowledged the source (the words in green), this cannot be said to be the writer’s own phrasing. Most American academic authorities would consider this plagiarism.
Example 3 – OK?

The *Nature* editorial suggests that some of the self-help books on the market might be helpful for certain graduate students because they provide a lot of practical advice. Most students will also find relevant articles from academic journals in their disciplines. [1]

1. “All Aboard for Graduate School,” *Nature Structural & Molecular Biology*, 13, 753

SOURCE: Although advice and self-help books are not everyone’s cup of tea, there are a number of tomes out there for those who prefer to read all about it. [...] These texts cover issues from choosing a lab to feeding your thesis committee. In addition, the *Science* and *Nature* journals publish columns on topics of interest to graduate students, so it’s often useful to glance over the first half of their tables of contents.

Here’s the last attempt. Is this one acceptable?

The *Nature* editorial suggests that some of the self-help books on the market might be helpful for certain graduate students because they provide a lot of practical advice. Most students will also find relevant articles from academic journals in their disciplines. [1]
This one gets the green light, of course. It is a good paraphrase by most standards, I think. It acknowledges the source with both an integral and non-integral citation (marked in green). And the text is clearly different. There are some words repeated – self-help books, journals, graduate students, but these all relate to the theme, or main idea, of the paragraph. What’s important is that the information and grammatical structures are different. You’ll also notice that there’s a different level of detail, with the paraphrase containing more general information than the original.
So, let’s go on now and try to write a summary of the whole article. The first decision is where to start. Remember that the situation we’re imagining is using the article as one source of information for a page in a graduate student handbook on resources for surviving grad school. Here are five opening phrases that I’ve prepared. You could of course use these for a shorter paraphrase as well. They’re all appropriate, but they would work differently in different contexts.

Numbers 1 and 2 put the most emphasis on the location and title of the source – this can be useful if you want to stress that the source is reputable (which it is) or the title particularly interesting (which it isn’t really). The third opener doesn’t mention the source directly, but makes it clear that the advice comes from other experts rather than just from me. All of these first three options are framing devices: that is, they frame the following information as coming from another source. #3 is a bit different because it suggests that I agree with the recommendations – that’s why I chose “experts”, presumably. The last sentence doesn’t have a frame at all – obviously it still needs an appropriate citation at the end, but in this version, I am not distancing myself from the ideas as much as in the others. If you compare #2 and 4, you should see what I mean by this.

So these are some of the considerations when writing the opening sentence: Will you identify the source? If so, how? Or, do you want to align yourself more closely with the ideas that follow?
In part 2, we analyzed the flow of information in the article and found that it presents 5 sources of information in order of increasing usefulness. For the purposes of our text, we’re going to describe them in the reverse order, starting with the most useful. I’m also going to disagree with the author and be more skeptical and blogs and more positive about online journal websites. Making a brief outline like this is a good way to ensure that you don’t miss any points and that your final text is likely to be clearly structured.
Now, I’m going to show you how I summarized the first stage in my text, which is the paragraph about mentoring.

Here is the original paragraph. I’m not going to read it aloud, but you can pause the video now if you’d like to read it for yourself.
And here now is my summary: Remember that a good summary is usually going to be considerably shorter than the original. This is 121 words compared with 226 words in the original, so about half the length. You can read it with me, or pause the video:

The article particularly recommends mentoring for graduate students. Although doctoral study is essentially an individual endeavor, a mentor can be a guide and advisor throughout your program. Although faculty in your lab or department may turn out to be your mentors, sometimes your professors’ schedules will mean that they are not readily accessible. In these cases, you will certainly need and value the help of fellow students, postdoctoral scholars, or lab technicians. Another source of mentoring is your dissertation committee, who can impartially advise you on your research and academic career. However committee members should be carefully chosen to balance faculty whose reputations may benefit you in the future and those who are willing and able to give you feedback and advice.

Let’s now look more closely at the strategies used in this summary.
I’ve started by summarizing the stance of the author of the source by saying that “experts particularly recommend mentoring (you could say “the article” instead of “experts”). This allows me to replace a long, idiomatic phrase in the original (“there is no substitute for”) with a simpler verb (recommend). At the same time, I’ve made the organization of my text clear: we’re starting with the strongest recommendation. There’s another useful strategy in this sentence: I’ve used a verb form (mentoring) in place of the noun “mentors.” Next, I’ve picked up an idea from the end of the original paragraph (green) — “although doctoral study is essentially an individual endeavor, a mentor can be a guide and advisor throughout your program. Faculty in your lab or department may turn out to be your mentors, but sometimes your professors’ schedules will mean that they are not readily accessible. In these cases, you will certainly need and value the help of fellow students, postdoctoral scholars, or lab technicians.”

Finally, I have continued using “you” in the last sentence so that I can change the adjective phrase “absolutely invaluable” into an adverb + verb: “you will certainly need”. Notice that my paraphrase of “post-docs, graduate students and technicians” is definitely close to the original (“fellow students, postdoctoral scholars, or lab technicians”), but it is still different because I have explained the meaning of post-docs and technicians to help the new graduate student reader.
As we continue, you can see that I have reduced the level of detail greatly and toned down the stance – I dropped the word “fantastic” for instance. In the last sentence, I’ve used one final paraphrasing trick, which is to change an active sentence into the passive (red): from “you should look for people” to “committee members should be chosen.” This has the effect of reorganizing the information, which is critical for an acceptable paraphrase. I prefer this structure anyway because it makes “committee members” the subject and Theme of the sentence and links to the end of my previous sentence. The passive also helps you by taking out the agent – in this case “you”, which I’ve already used quite a lot in a fairly short text. I explained my last phrase “willing and able to give you feedback and advice” in video 2.
You can download and read the entire summary I’ve attempted on the ESL videos page of our website, where you can also find the first two videos in this series and all my PowerPoint slides and transcripts.

To wrap up, then, here are the techniques described in these videos for writing a summary or paraphrase by considering the organization, stance, and level of detail:

- Use a classifying word
- Use a general, abstract term
- Reduce details and examples
- Change the part of speech
- Use specific terms instead of metaphors
- Replace long phrases with more concise ones
- Change the voice (active/passive)

Paraphrasing and summary are two of the more difficult tasks in academic writing, especially if English is not your first language. And as you progress in your studies, you may need to change your style. As I said in part 1, the definition of plagiarism and the standards for paraphrase can vary by culture, institution, discipline, and genre, so as you write new kinds of texts in new fields, you will need to adapt the way you use sources. But all this will make you a better writer and academic!
I hope you’ve enjoyed this series on paraphrasing and plagiarism. 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.