

## HOW TO PARAPHRASE

You do not want to quote everything that you cite. As a general rule, quotes should never take up over 1/3 of a paragraph—although sometimes they may (if a quote is over four lines long then the entire quote should be left-indented). When you want to cite a specific passage of a story or article but do not want to quote it then you must paraphrase it, which means write the passage in your own words.

## HOW TO PARAPHRASE

When we quote a passage, we do so in order to analyze how a specific effect works in the text. If there is no clear effect that we wish to discuss, we may want to simply paraphrase the key incidents or details of a passage so as to avoid slowing down our own writing with the words of someone else. Paraphrase is most useful when you want to present or examine an author's line of reasoning but don't feel the original words merit direct quotation.

## HOW TO PARAPHRASE

We need to be careful when we paraphrase, though. We have to create a sentence that uses a different sentence structure and language. If our paraphrase contains elements that are a word-for-word match to the source text or so close that it is difficult to tell the difference, we could be charged with **plagiarism** because it looks like we are trying to steal the words or ideas of someone else.

# HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas or words as your own. Every summary and paraphrase that you write must be in your own words. If you are using someone else's words, you must quote them and cite them. If you are using someone else's ideas in your summaries or paraphrases, you must cite them.

# HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

**Exercise. Look at the improperly paraphrased passage below. Do you notice any similarities between the original and the paraphrased passages (hint: you should!).**

Original: The character and mentality of the keepers may be of more importance in understanding prisons than the character and mentality of the kept. (From Jessica Mitford's *Kind and Usual Punishment*, page 9).

Plagiarized: But the character of prison officials (the keepers) is more important in understanding prisons than the character of prisoners (the kept).

# HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

**Almost every word in the plagiarized sentence is a copy of the original. Only cosmetic changes have been made to the original. This is not effective paraphrasing.**

Original: The character and mentality of the keepers may be of more importance in understanding prisons than the character and mentality of the kept. (From Jessica Mitford's *Kind and Usual Punishment*, page 9).

Plagiarized: But the character of prison officials (the keepers) is more important in understanding prisons than the character of prisoners (the kept).\*

\*(and there is NO citation and no signal phrase, which also makes this passage plagiarized)

# HOW TO AVOID PLAGIARISM

Original: The character and mentality of the keepers may be of more importance in understanding prisons than the character and mentality of the kept. (From Jessica Mitford's *Kind and Usual Punishment*, page 9).

Plagiarized: In understanding prisons, we should know more about the character and mentality of the keepers than of the kept.

**Here is a better paraphrase of this passage, using a signal phrase and a parenthetical citations:**

**As Mitford argues in *Kind and Usual Punishment*, it could be of more value to analyze who jailkeepers are and what they think than to analyze who their prisoners are or what they think (9).**

**Exercise 8. Practice paraphrasing the quote below on a separate sheet of paper. Remember, in a paraphrase you must rewrite the original passage in YOUR OWN words. As with a quote, you also must introduce your paraphrase with a signal phrase. (And don't forget the parenthetical citation!)**

**Here is A.S. Berg's description of the requirements for life to exist.**

“Though the specific mechanism from which life sprung remains a bone of contention, it is known that for life to develop, certain elements are needed: carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur.”

From A.S. Berg, “Scanning the Cosmos: The Search for Life in the Universe,” page 13.



**How does your paraphrase compare to these? Did you rewrite Berg thoroughly enough.**

Original: Though the specific mechanism from which life [on Earth] sprung remains a bone of contention, it is known that for life to develop, certain elements are needed: carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur.”

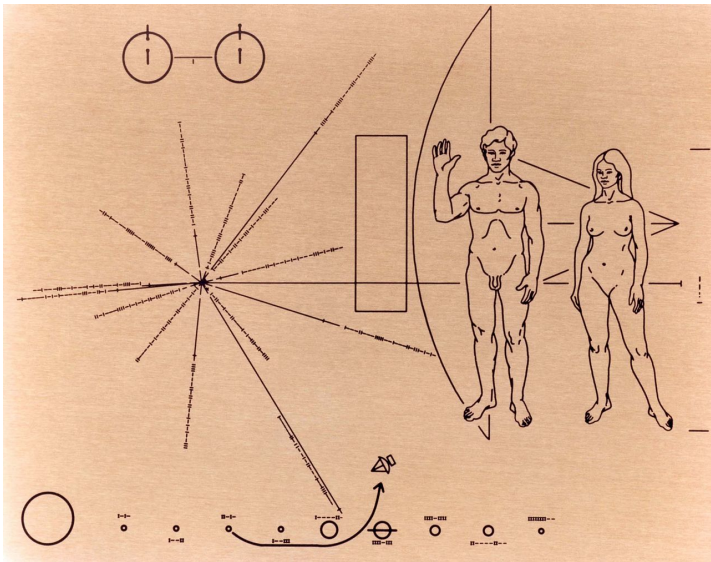
—From A.S. Berg, “Scanning the Cosmos: The Search for Life in the Universe,” page 13.

Paraphrase 1:

We do not know how life on Earth itself actually developed; however, we do know that all life requires carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur (Berg 13).

Paraphrase 2:

As A.S. Berg argues in her article, we do not know how life on Earth itself actually developed; however, we do know that all life requires carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur (13).



**Exercise 9. Practice paraphrasing the passage below on a separate sheet of paper. Remember, in a paraphrase you must rewrite the original passage in **YOUR OWN** words. As with a quote, you also must introduce your paraphrase with a signal phrase. (And don't forget the parenthetical citation!)**

“The famous hieroglyphs on Pioneer spacecraft in the 1970s, intended to depict a man, a woman, and ‘data’ about Earth, are capable of any interpretation you like. The accompanying scribbles of supposed atoms in two spin states are hopelessly unrepresentative. A race disinterested in atoms would be baffled; a race that properly understood atoms would never guess. They might deduce we live near a binary star.”

From Clive Trotman, “Science, Silly Science, and SETI,” page 67.

## **How does your paraphrase compare to the original? Did you rewrite it thoroughly in your own words and style?**

Original: “The famous hieroglyphs on Pioneer spacecraft in the 1970s, intended to depict a man, a woman, and ‘data’ about Earth, are capable of any interpretation you like. The accompanying scribbles of supposed atoms in two spin states are hopelessly unrepresentative. A race disinterested in atoms would be baffled; a race that properly understood atoms would never guess. They might deduce we live near a binary star.”

The Pioneer plaques from the 1970s illustrate how difficult it would be to communicate with an alien species. While the plaque contains a picture of a man and woman along with information about our planet, it is very difficult to actually read. There are pictures of atoms that could really be anything. Some aliens may not even know what an atom is and those that knew about them would never recognize them from these crude drawings. Indeed, they might even be misread as a picture of a binary star (Trotman, 2005, p. 67).

**Exercise 10. Practice paraphrasing the quote below on a separate sheet of paper. Remember, in a paraphrase you must rewrite the original passage in YOUR OWN words. As with a quote, you also must introduce your paraphrase with a signal phrase. (And don't forget the parenthetical citation!)**

The twenties were the years when drinking was against the law, and the law was a bad joke because everyone knew of a local bar where liquor could be had. They were the years when organized crime ruled the cities, and the police seemed powerless to do anything against it. Classical music was forgotten while jazz spread throughout the land, and men like Bix Beiderbecke, Louis Armstrong, and Count Basie became the heroes of the young. The flapper was born in the twenties, and with her bobbed hair and short skirts, she symbolized, perhaps more than anyone or anything else, America's break with the past.

From Kathleen Yancey, *The Roaring Twenties* (1989): 25.

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From Kathleen Yancey, *The Roaring Twenties* (1989): 25.

As Kathleen Yancey observes in her book, *The Roaring Twenties*, the decade of the 1920s was a lawless and culturally transformative time. While alcohol was illegal, it could be readily found in neighborhood pubs. Law enforcement was unable to counter the influence of criminal syndicates in the nation's urban areas. Young people stopped listening to classical music and turned to jazz instead, lionizing musicians such as Beiderbecke, Armstrong and Basie. Women called flappers cut their hair short and their skirts shorter, a perfect emblem of how the nation was moving swiftly away from its cultural traditions (25).

# USE QUOTES, PARAPHRASES, AND SUMMARIES TOGETHER

Writers frequently intertwine summaries, paraphrases, and quotations. As part of a summary of an article, a chapter, or a book, a writer might include paraphrases of various key points blended with quotations of striking or suggestive phrases as in the following example:

In his famous and influential work *On the Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud argues that dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious" (12), expressing in coded imagery the dreamer's unfulfilled wishes through a process known as the "dream work" (95). According to Freud, actual but unacceptable desires are censored internally and subjected to coding through layers of condensation and displacement before emerging in a kind of rebus puzzle in the dream itself (66).