

# Pointers for Paraphrasing

*Adapted from the original by Peggy Ridlen, Reference & Instruction Librarian, Fontbonne University*

Most students who are serious learners do not deliberately set out to commit plagiarism. Instead, students usually plagiarize unintentionally, as an act of desperation that reflects an unsophisticated writing style and a lack of understanding of how to avoid it. The following will attempt to explain how to develop a few essential skills that will lead to an approach to writing that will automatically prevent plagiarism.

Somewhere along the way, you've likely learned what plagiarism is and a few basic rules about avoiding it. You know about summarizing, using quotes, and citing sources properly. You are aware of style manuals and guidelines and can more or less follow them. You know about endnotes, footnotes, and in-text documentation (at least in theory). And you know that these must match the "References" page (APA), the "Works Cited Page" (MLA) or the "Bibliography" page (Chicago) attached to the end of a paper.

However, even students who know all of the above sometimes encounter difficulty developing a writing style that does not plagiarize and aren't always able to recognize whether or not they have committed plagiarism. **Ultimately, avoiding plagiarism boils down to one essential skill: the ability to write and recognize a good paraphrase.**

1. Read the original source twice. Read the first time for a general understanding of the content. Read the second time for more detail, jotting down a few notes to refer to later as you read for retention. (Some students might argue that they don't have time to read a source twice. However, taking the time to do so at first will enable you to develop paraphrasing skills. Later, as a more proficient reader and writer, reading twice may not be necessary.) See an alternative method outlined below.\*
2. Without looking at the original source or your notes, write in your own words the main ideas expressed and relate them to your topic. It is usually quicker to write out your own thoughts than to try to find someone else's and make them fit coherently. The key is having something to say. Ideas come from doing some preliminary reading and thinking about what you've read.
3. As a general rule, do not use more than 3 words in a row that have been used in the original source without putting quotation marks around them and using in-text documentation. This is phrase copying and is probably the most frequently made error.
4. Use an ellipsis (three periods) when quoting or paraphrasing long sentences or paragraphs. This allows you to omit non-essential parts from the original source, thus making your writing more concise and allowing you to avoid plagiarism. As always be sure to use in-text documentation.

## EXAMPLES

- *"Give me your tired . . . yearning to be free" (Smith, p. 72).*
- *"Ernest Hemingway was fond of fishing . . . His understanding of that sport . . . is in many of his writings" (Jones, p. 38).*

5. Use the direct approach.

EXAMPLES

- *According to Dr. Donna Doer (2012), "What I believe is . . . ."*
- *Dr. Jim Jones (2016) explains: "I don't believe a word Dr. Doer says."*
- *In her most recent work, Don't Go There, Janet Johnsen argues "It is not . . . ."*

6. Do not substitute synonyms for words in the original passage without changing the structure of the sentence. This is grammar copying and is another frequent error made in paraphrasing and is considered plagiarism.
7. Use your own voice. Let your thoughts and personality shine through by relating the ideas from your sources to your topic in your own words. Most professors want to see original thought substantiated by relevant scholarship.
8. Always refer to the appropriate citation style manual for proper format. Double-check your work. **Proofread! Proofread! Proofread!**

With practice, incorporating these simple pointers will help you develop a writing style that will naturally avoid plagiarism.

Many students do, under pressure of time, plagiarize by directly copying or cutting and pasting from a source, hoping no one will take the time to "catch" them. **Be aware that the ease and speed with which you can plagiarize is equal to the ease and speed with which you can be caught.**

**\*Although each student must discover the process that works best for him or her, the following tips were offered by a colleague as an alternative method for avoiding plagiarism.**

As you read sources on a selected topic

- Highlight concise or unique phrases you might want to use as direct quotes.
- Think about what you want to say – who your audience is, the major points you want to make, and in what order you will make them.
- Write the first draft, leaving blanks where you want to fill in quotes to support your arguments.
- Go back and locate the supportive quotes, inserting them into the appropriate blanks.
- Check to make sure you have not inadvertently internalized any of your sources so that additional citation is needed (#3).
- Always proofread and revise.