# Paraphrasing

## A Definition

Paraphrasing is the use of another’s ideas to enhance your own work. In a paraphrase, you rewrite in your own words the ideas taken from the source. Paraphrases avoid excessive reliance on quotations and demonstrate that you understand the source author’s argument. A paraphrase always has a different sentence structure and word choice. When done well, it is much more concise than the original.

One helpful strategy to help orient your reader is to use a signal phrase to introduce the paraphrase, such as “Werner Sollors, in *Beyond Ethnicity,* argues that….” These phrases indicate the source of the paraphrase and help integrate the borrowed ideas into your own work. Because a paraphrase is your restatement of a borrowed idea, it is not set within quotation marks. Though the ideas may be borrowed, a paraphrase requires your writing to be original; simply changing a few words or rearranging words or sentences is not paraphrasing. In fact, in the context of the American university, it’s considered plagiarism, a severe academic offense that can result in expulsion from the university.

## Citations

In American universities, students are expected to provide citations for paraphrases, just like direct quotations. Consult your instructor, a UWC consultant, a UWC handout on documentation, or a relevant handbook if you have questions about how to cite your sources. The following examples use MLA 8 style.

## Note taking and Paraphrasing

Careful note taking can improve your paraphrases. When taking notes, be sure to include quotation marks around any words that are directly copied from a source. It can also be helpful to paraphrase during the note-taking process. To do so, read the source carefully, think about the ideas it conveys, and then write, in your own words, your digest of what you have read. Be sure to note the source for proper citation. These early-stage paraphrases can benefit your eventual draft by giving you the opportunity to think through the source’s ideas and determine how they fit into your project.

## Paraphrase Issue #1: Missing Source Citation

***Original Passage:*** “They desire, for example, virtue and the absence of vice, no less really than pleasure and the absence of pain.”

Source: Mill, John Stuart. “Utilitarianism.” *On Liberty and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 169.

***Paraphrase:*** People want morality just as much as they want happiness.

***Explanation:*** This paraphrase is an accurate summary of the above passage, but it does not cite the source of its main ideas. To avoid the danger of plagiarizing, the author of this paraphrase should add a source citation.

## Paraphrase Issue #2: Lack of Significant Rewording

***Original Passage:*** “To the young American architects who made the pilgrimage, the most dazzling figure of all was Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School. Gropius opened the Bauhaus in Weimar, the German capital, in 1919. It was more than a school; it was a commune, a spiritual movement, a radical approach to art in all its forms, a philosophical center comparable to the Garden of Epicurus.”

Source: Wolfe, Tom. *From Bauhaus to Our House.* New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1981, pp. 10.

***Paraphrase:*** As Tom Wolfe notes, to young American architects who went to Germany, the most dazzling figure was Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School (10). Gropius opened the Bauhaus in the German capital of Weimar in 1919. It was, however, more than a school; it was a commune, a spiritual movement, a philosophical center like the Garden of Epicurus.

***Explanation:*** This excerpt is not a paraphrase at all; it is too similar to the source. Rather than digesting the ideas, it uses the same words and structure as the original. The effect, though likely unintentional, is a plagiarized passage. This author of the paraphrase could either rework the passage’s structure and wording more extensively, or give the passage as a quotation instead of as a paraphrase.

## An Effective Paraphrase

***Original Passage:*** “The Republican Convention of 1860, which adopted planks calling for a tariff, internal improvements, a Pacific railroad and a homestead law, is sometimes seen as a symbol of Whig triumph within the party. A closer look, however, indicates that the Whig’s triumph within the party was of a very tentative nature.”

Source: Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 175.

***Paraphrase:*** Contrary to many historians, Eric Foner argues that the Republican platform of 1860 should not be understood as an indication of Whig dominance of the party (175).

***Explanation:*** This paraphrase is properly cited and represents an accurate and concise summary of the source.

This handout was adapted from “Academic Integrity,” a web publication of the Office of the Dean of Student, Student Judicial Services, <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/academicintegrity.html>.