

ALL ABOUT PARAPHRASING AS A WAY TO SUPPORT YOUR IDEAS IN AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

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WHAT DOES THE WORD PARAPHRASE MEAN?

'Paraphrasing' means taking an idea or ideas contained in a piece of existing writing that was composed by someone else and restating/rewriting in **YOUR OWN WORDS**. However, you must retain the central idea or the theme to ensure that you don't change the meaning of the passage, only the way it is written. To do this you need to make use of **difference words** and even change the sentence structure by **combing two sentences** in order to make the meaning simpler, shorter and clearer.

WHAT PARAPHRASING DOES NOT MEAN:

Cutting and pasting the expert's sentence or paragraph into your essay and just using an on-line thesaurus to replace some of the words with other words which often results in you writing 'nonsense' sentences – see the example below.

WHY DO WE PARAPHRASE?

When we are writing an academic essay about a piece of visual art (a painting or sculpture) or a literary text (a novel, a play or a poem) we have to support our ideas/arguments to prove that we have thought these out carefully and that they are just not the result of a 'thumb-suck'.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

By (1) referring to an aspect of either the art work (e.g. the brush strokes) or the written text (e.g. a line from a poem) and (2) finding similar ideas written by 'experts' (such as an art or literary critic) in journal articles that we find on the internet or in a library – to support our ideas.

HOWEVER, we need to remember that we don't like it when someone takes and uses our possessions without asking us first and would regard such an action as stealing. Well, in the same way, we cannot just take someone's words and put them in our essay without acknowledging that we have done so by writing the name of the writer and the year the words were written after them.

If we want to support our idea with just a clause or a sentence written by the 'expert', then it is QUITE EASY to do so. We can quote the author *verbatim*– this means we write the exact words in inverted commas and then we acknowledge the fact that the idea is not our own by writing the author's surname, followed by the year in which it was written, e.g. 'Magical Realism is a narrative technique that blurs the distinction of fantasy and reality' (Valjee, 2009).

However, sometimes we need to use the ideas from a **whole paragraph** to support our arguments and then we **can't just copy out the whole paragraph**, even if we do write the author's name and the year at the end of it. IN THIS CASE WE HAVE TO PARAPHRASE THE IDEAS THAT EXPERT HAS WRITTEN.

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'PARAPHRASE' MEAN?

Here is an example of a paragraph written about Magical Realism, a literary genre or style of writing, that needs to be paraphrased before it can be included in an essay:

Magical Realism does not refer simply to the oddities and eccentricities of human behaviour, nor to the sometimes astounding world of natural causes and events, nor to the surprising acts of

coincidence and fate that occasionally appear to be directed by an uncertain authority (Valjee 2009).

Here is an example of how it SHOULD NOT be paraphrased:

Magical Realism does not refer **modestly** to the **cards** and oddities of **creature manners**, nor to the sometimes **flabbergasting** world of **geological** causes and **aftermaths**, nor to the surprising acts of **fluke** and **doom** that **intermittently** appear to be directed by a **hesitant confidence** (Valjee 2009).

I'm sure you'll agree that the above "paraphrased" paragraph does not make much sense, Why is that? Because the writer hasn't bothered to understand the passage and then rewrite it in her own words, but rather has just 'summa' changed some of the words.

Here is a simpler and shorter way of expressing the main ideas in this paragraph:

According to Valjee (2009) Magical realism does not involve just writing about people's strange habits and unusual events that are often deemed to be 'acts of fate'.

HOW DO WE PARAPHRASE SUCCESSFULLY?

(1) READ through the passage you want to paraphrase TWO OR THREE TIMES.

Make sure that you UNDERSTAND what it means – what the writer is trying to tell you in the passage.

YOU CANNOT PARAPHRASE A PASSAGE THAT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

(2) Underline the main nouns (naming words) and verbs (action words) in the passage, because these are the words that carry the meaning.

(3) Stop looking at the passage and think about what you have just read.

(4) Then try and jot down the main ideas/theme in your own words – remember this theme will be similar to your own idea because this is why you want to use it to justify your idea in your essay. It doesn't have to be a proper sentence to begin with – just the key words.

(5) Use these key words to write the sentences in your OWN WORDS, using your own sentence structure. Remember to make it as straightforward as possible so that it is easy to understand.

HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

YOU CHANGE THE WORDS for simpler ones. If necessary, change structure of the sentences and make sure they are not too long. You can even change the sequence in which the ideas are presented. For example:

The ideas expressed in the following sentence:

According to Valjee (2009) Magical realism does not involve just writing about people's strange habits and unusual events that are often deemed to be 'acts of fate'. can be written as:

Valjee (2009) stated that writers who choose to use Magical Realism as a genre, do not solely describe unusual 'acts of fate' or eccentric human practices.

THE ONLY THING YOU CAN'T CHANGE IS THE MEANING.

REMEMBER PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT, and so the first time you paraphrase something in the above way, it will probably be quite difficult and time-consuming, but the more you do it the easier and quicker it will become and the effort will be well worth it in terms of the improved marks you will receive for your essays.

HOW NOT TO PARAPHRASE!

Don't just use an online thesaurus to replace certain words by choosing just any of the alternative words offered.

The meaning of a word is related to the sentence and situation in which it is being used – so you must make sure the word you choose to replace it with has the same meaning. An important thing to remember is that the same word can have many different meanings and can often be used in dissimilar ways, for example as a noun – Practice makes perfect, as a verb – to perfect your writing style, as an adjective to tell us something more about the noun – It is a perfect day, and even as an adverb to tell us more about how the action is performed – The mask fits perfectly.