



# SUMMARISING AND PARAPHRASING

Summarising and paraphrasing require important thinking and writing skills which are crucial for success at university. In your essays or other written work lecturers expect more than copied (plagiarised) pages from the text books and journals. They expect you to demonstrate an understanding of the major ideas/concepts and important issues in the discipline. By paraphrasing and summarising you can develop and demonstrate your understanding and interpretation of a text. In addition, these two forms of writing are powerful tools for reshaping information to match the many writing tasks you will be required to do at university.

## Summarising is a useful skill for:

- notemaking for reading
- notetaking in lectures
- writing an abstract/synopsis
- writing the summary section of critical reviews
- writing annotated bibliographies
- speaking in seminars and tutorials
- exam preparation

## Paraphrasing is a useful skill for:

- notemaking from reading
- notetaking in lectures
- integrating evidence/sources in essays, journals and research reports
- explaining information in tables, charts and diagrams
- exam preparation

If you are going to include a summary or paraphrase in an assignment there are two ways to ensure you do not plagiarise or misinterpret the original text:

- Remember to acknowledge the source as you are presenting another author's idea
- Do not rely on just changing one or two words as the text will result in an inaccurate plagiarised version. Also, such a narrow approach to your thinking and writing will guarantee little development or demonstration of your understanding of the information.



**Related resources:**  
Referencing FAQs  
APA

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## How to Summarise & Paraphrase

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By following these 10 points and practising you will increase your understanding of a written text and be able to write a good summary or paraphrase.

1. Identify the purpose of the summary/paraphrase: Is it for your notes, for a critical review, to include as evidence supporting your understanding of a topic?
2. Read the original carefully. Check the meanings of words you are unfamiliar with. Read the text at least twice or till you are certain you understand it.
3. Select the important idea/s and information by highlighting the original or taking separate notes. Select the important definitions of key terms that you may need to include.
4. Select the main claim/thesis of the text to be summarised/paraphrased. Even if this is not explicitly expressed, try to write your own understanding of the author's claim
5. Gather groups of details, examples and minor ideas under more general terms, a phrase or single word.
6. Do not include repeated ideas/information from the original.
7. Include the attitude of the authors. Are they critical, praising, certain, uncertain?
8. After writing a summary or paraphrase, check that the meaning and attitude of the original text is unaltered.
9. Use quotation marks ( " " ) for unique/specialist phrases you have retained from the original.
10. Always keep accurate bibliographical details for in-text references/footnotes and your Reference list.

While you will spend more of your time alone (reading, re-reading, taking notes, forming interpretations, writing and re-writing) do not neglect opportunities in tutorials and after classes to talk about your ideas or raise questions about the course material. Being able to verbalise ideas and their relationships further improves your understanding of the course material which will make the task of summarising and paraphrasing much easier.