Paraphrasing

# What is paraphrasing?

When writers borrow someone else’s words or ideas to use in a research paper, they may either quote those words exactly or they can express the ideas in their own words. In either case, the original author must be acknowledged through a citation. It is often difficult to figure out how to craft an original sentence or two from someone else’s words but is a good skill to develop because in most academic writing there is a preference for this kind of “indirect quote” over the use of too many direct quotes.

Paraphrasing (or indirect quoting) is accurately putting another person’s words into your own words through a thorough understanding of the original quote. The original quote being paraphrased is generally between 1-3 sentences, but it could be up to a paragraph.

## Steps to creating a paraphrase

Use the following steps to help write a successful paraphrase:

1. Read and think about what the passage means.
2. Look away from the source and write down the information in your own words, including any key words/ideas or shared language (commonly used terminology in the subject area/discipline).
3. Check the meaning of the paraphrased text against the original. Add anything you left out that you feel is important to the main idea but using your own words.
4. Make sure you avoid using the same word order and sentence structure as the original, unless it is shared language. Note: If you write any three consecutive words from the original in your paraphrased version, they need to be put into quotes.
5. Add the proper in-text citation.

## Example

### Original Quote:

“Felines, if properly motivated, can be trained to do a wide variety of tricks, from opening doors and jumping through hoops to turning on lights. In what psychologists call operant conditioning, a cat will repeat a behavior for a food reward. This is best achieved if the desired behavior is fun for the cat, even more so if the person doing the training is its usual food provider.”

source: <http://www.animalplanet.com/pets/cat-intelligence/>

## Steps to Paraphrasing

### Step 1: Understanding the quote

This passage is about teaching cats how to do tricks. There is a special phrase called “operant conditioning” that I might want to use as shared language. The main ideas are that food is a good motivator to get cats to behave in a special way, and that it is best if the cat’s trainer is the person who normally provides its food, too.

### Step 2: Paraphrase attempt #1

Cat owners can train their pets to do tricks by using operant conditioning, like repeatedly offered food as a reward, each time it obeys a command. While anyone can teach a cat to behave in a particular way, it works best if the trainer is the cat’s owner.

### Step 3: Making sure all the elements are there

I notice that the trainer is not necessarily the cat’s owner and the cat may not be the trainer’s pet. I should change the wording on that. Also, I left out the part about the cat having fun while doing the tricks.

### Step 4: Paraphrase attempt #2

A cat can be trained to do tricks by using operant conditioning, like being repeatedly offered food as a reward, each time it obeys a command. While anyone can teach a cat to behave in a particular way, it works best if the trainer is the person who normally provides its food. Additionally, the cat responds best if the trick is fun for the animal.

### Step 5: Rephrasing and rewording

Words/phrases like “repeatedly offered food as a reward” is very close to the author’s phrase “repeat a behavior for a food reward.” I should try to say it another way. In the original, the psychological term operant conditioning isn’t mentioned until the second sentence. I like that I moved it to the beginning of my indirect quote. I wonder if I can make it even more focused by rewording my first sentence.

### Step 6: Final paraphrase

Using what is known as operant conditioning, a person can train a cat to perform a variety of behaviors and tricks by repeatedly rewarding the animal when it obeys a command. The trainer’s directions are more likely to be repeated by the cat when food is used as a reward. While anyone can teach a cat to behave in a particular way, the best results are achieved when it is the cat’s normal feeder doing the training and when the experience is engaging and fun for the animal (Animal Planet).

## Now you try it!

### Practice quote #1

“Through an emerging scientific process called gene drives, scientists could alter the genetics of mosquitoes to prevent them from passing along these diseases to the human population. Someday, scientists could use the technology we have now to alter humanity to make us all more cancer resistant, for example. But the gene drives—and the power they create—are so controversial and riddled with moral and ethical scientific dilemma that the world has collectively slow-tracked their use.”

Thompson, John. “Editors of the Species.” Western Washington University Window, Fall-Winter 2016, p. 26-30.

### Practice quote #2

“Before Piaget’s work, the common assumption in psychology was that children are merely less competent thinkers than adults. Piaget showed that young children think in strikingly different ways compared to adults. According to Piaget, children are born with a very basic mental structure (genetically inherited and evolved) on which all subsequent learning and knowledge is based.”

McLeod, S. A. (2015). Jean Piaget. Retrieved from [www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html)

## Example answers to practice quotes

### Practice paraphrase #1 (MLA)

Although scientists currently have the ability to change the genetic makeup of insects such as the mosquito in order to prevent them from spreading diseases to humans, there is so much moral and ethical controversy surrounding applying the gene drive process to humans that the world has been very slow to take up that endeavor (Thompson 26).

### Practice paraphrase #2 (APA)

Jean Piaget’s research in child psychology resulted in a new idea that the thinking of children was not inferior to adults but rather showed that their thinking was entirely different from adults. He believed that a basic mental configuration present in children at birth allows them to learn and that their future learning and knowledge-making is based on that mental structure (McLeod, 2015).