Paraphrasing Practice for Non-Native English Speakers

Methods of Paraphrasing

Before you even begin to paraphrase, you need to make certain that you understand what you are reading. If you do not understand what you read, you cannot paraphrase it.

There are six ways that you can change sentences to paraphrase the information. You will probably not use all of them in the same sentence, but you can use ones that are appropriate. (In each of the examples, only one change is made. This is not enough if you are actually paraphrasing.) Read about each type of change, and look at the examples. Then make that type of change in the sample sentences that follow.

Changing Word Order

One way you can change a sentence for paraphrasing is to change the word order. For example, you might change “Because I slept too late, I missed my first class” to “I missed my first class because I slept too late,” or “In order to pass that class, I had to study very hard” to “I had to study very hard in order to pass that class.” It is sometimes necessary to change the wording of the parts of the sentences. For example, “Terry wanted more books, but he couldn’t afford them,” can be changed to “Terry couldn’t afford more books, even though he wanted them.”

1. If you’re going to New York for Christmas, be sure to take warm clothes.

2. Even though the weather was good, Joan was in a bad mood.

3. I had no money, so I borrowed some.
Changing Parts of Speech
You can also change parts of speech. If the sentence uses a noun, you can rewrite the sentence to use the verb or adjective form of the word, for example. You can change “Fifty-four men signed the Declaration of Independence” to “Fifty-four men put their signatures on the Declaration of Independence.”

1. The company needs to find a solution for this problem.

2. The poor economy has been the cause of high unemployment.

3. If you eat rabbit, you will find its taste like chicken.

Using Synonyms
English has many synonyms -- words that have the same or similar meanings -- so another way you can paraphrase is to change one word for a synonym. For example, you could change “Movies can be divided into three categories” to “Movies can be divided into three types.”

1. The way a person dresses affects the impression that other people have.

2. That phrase means “in a happy way.”

3. There is little chance that the situation will improve.
Using Negatives or Opposite Expressions

Another way to paraphrase is to change a positive expression into a negative expression, or a negative expression into a positive expression. You could change “Rather than building a traditional memorial, the city built a park” to “The city did not build a traditional memorial; instead it built a park.”

1. Shaun was disappointed, because the movie wasn’t very good.

2. Japan is not a small country, compared to European countries.

3. Geri wanted some candy, but there wasn’t any in the bowl.

Combining or Separating Sentences

Long sentences can be divided, and short sentences can be combined with other short sentences. You can change “Ireland is a wonderful country, which has beautiful scenery, friendly people, and an interesting history” to “Ireland is a wonderful country. It has beautiful scenery, friendly people, and an interesting history.” You can also change “Ireland is a wonderful country. It has beautiful scenery, friendly people, and an interesting history” to “Ireland, which is a wonderful country, has beautiful scenery, friendly people, and an interesting history.”

1. Elizabeth I was the daughter of Henry VIII. She is one of England’s most famous queens.

2. This book is about a woman who pretended to be a man to join the army in World War II. It is one of Lynn’s favorite books.
3. If you go to London, you should be sure to visit Westminster Abbey, where many of the kings and queens of England, as well as other famous people, are buried.

Using Different Grammar - Structure, Voice
You can paraphrase by changing the grammar of a sentence, for example, but changing from active voice (“The dog bit the man”) to passive voice (“The man was bitten by the dog”) or by making other changes in the grammar. You can change “It is not unusual for June to be a rainy month here” to “June is often a rainy month here,” or “It is thought that this new plan will save money” to “Many people think that this new plan will save money.”

1. Various languages are spoken in this country.

2. Frank studied French, and, as a result, he translated for our visitors from France.

3. Tom McGovern got married three times and had five children.
PRACTICE

Read the following sentences and paraphrase them, combining the techniques in this article.

1. *Gone with the Wind*, which was published in 1936, covered 12 years of the life of a woman named Scarlett O’Hara during and after the Civil War. It began when she was 16 year old and tells the story of her love for two men.

2. While California’s cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco are probably better known, California is fortunate enough to have a great deal of beautiful scenery, both in its mountains and along its coast.

3. The Internet is a vast treasure house of knowledge, but it does not have any central organization, and so it can be difficult to find information, if you are not familiar with it.

4. Americans consider someone who looks them in the eye to be honest. A person who looks down or looks away, in contrast, is suspected of being dishonest.