



Paraphrasing

The words 'paraphrasing' and 'summarising' are sometimes used interchangeably, but usually they are used to mean two different techniques. If you're not sure if you are required to summarise or paraphrase, check with your tutor.

A **paraphrase** is rewriting a piece of text in your own words, while retaining the meaning. It is usually similar in length to the original text.

A **summary**, in contrast, is a description of the main ideas of a text, and so it is shorter than the original text. A journal article might be summarised in a single paragraph, for example, or a whole book summarised in a few paragraphs. To summarise something – like a TV show or an article – is to condense it down to the 'bare bones'.

Both paraphrasing and summarising are important techniques in academic writing.

You'll use paraphrasing and summarising both when you take notes during your research and when you incorporate evidence from sources into your own work.

Paraphrase vs Summary

Paraphrase	Summary
Should be about the same length as the original text	Can be very short
More detailed than summary and can include supporting ideas and examples	Communicates only the main ideas, leaving out supporting ideas and examples
Uses different words to the original text	Uses different words to the original text

Paraphrasing is both a technique for using evidence and an academic skill in itself. Sometimes paraphrasing tasks are set for assessment to see how you are going in developing your skill.

Steps in the paraphrase process

1. First, make sure you understand the source itself. Check the definitions of any keywords if you are unsure.
2. Next, put the reading aside and make some notes from memory.
3. Then compare your notes with the reading to make sure you have included all the key information. Redraft your paraphrase if necessary.
4. Place quotation marks around any unique phrases you have borrowed directly from the source. Note that it is OK not to change technical words, as there often will not be appropriate synonyms for these.
5. Make sure to note down the full details of the source so you can properly cite the material.

Examples of some paraphrasing techniques

- Changing positive statements to negative statements and vice versa
 - Changing the words and word order
- Leaving out unnecessary words and information
 - Changing the sentence structure
- Preserving technical terms that don't have appropriate synonyms

Note that paraphrasing is **NOT** just changing the words around or substituting one or two words for synonyms.

Also, you cannot just look up each word individually in a dictionary or thesaurus and replace it with a similar word. You need to choose appropriate vocabulary and integrate your changes across the sentence or paragraph. Sometimes it might be tempting to use an online translation tool to produce a new version of a sentence or paragraph, but the result will usually not make sense.

The process of paraphrasing: an example

Sample text from Lewis & Foley (2014, p. 61):

The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities. Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills. Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers. Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.

Following the paraphrasing process

1. Check personal understanding. Are there any words you don't understand? Look them up.
2. Put the text aside and make some notes from memory. My notes, for example, might read:
 - student nurse data -> analysis
 - priorities
 - lack of knowledge and expertise
 - learning to think like a nurse
 - develop confidence
 - var. pts
 - clinical placement opportunities on placement
3. Compare notes with the text. A lot of key information is missing, so I need to go through the text carefully and note the important parts, in particular the direct quotes.
4. Redraft paraphrase.

Let's do this redrafting one sentence at a time:

Sentence 1 from source

The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities.

First identify the technical words and language features:

- nurse (there is no word that means exactly the same thing as nurse)
- data collection
- This text uses the second person to appeal to the reader on a personal level. Usually we don't use 'I' or 'you' in academic writing, so we need to change this to the third person.

What is the key idea of this sentence?

Student nurses need to progress from collecting data to being confident in analysing data to find abnormalities and prioritise tasks.



Assess: This is both the key idea and a pretty good paraphrase. We'll keep it.

Changes made:

- 'move beyond' changed to 'progress'
- 'data collection' changed to 'collecting data'
- 'develop your confidence' to 'being confident'
- Second person (you) changed to third (student nurses)
- Singular 'a student nurse' changed to plural 'student nurses'
- Structural change: The second part of the sentence was condensed into analysing data, finding abnormalities, and prioritising tasks.

Sentence 2 from source

Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills.

Technical words:

- nurse
- clinical judgement

What is the key idea of this sentence?

New nurses don't have much knowledge or experience but they can learn to improve.



Assess: Contractions are informal, so expand 'don't' to 'do not'. The sentence doesn't specify **what** it is that nurses can learn to improve, so we should add more information.

New nurses do not have much knowledge or experience, but they can still develop their clinical judgement.

Changes made:

- 'beginning nurses' to 'new nurses'
- 'lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have' rewritten as 'do not have much knowledge or experience'
- 'although' replaced with 'but' and moved to second clause
- 'learn to improve' changed to 'develop'
- 'skills' omitted (but sense retained)

Sentence 3 from source

Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers.

Technical words:

- nurse
- clinical judgement
- patients

Note that this sentence contains a citation that you need to incorporate into your paraphrase.

What is the key idea of this sentence?

Etheridge learned that new nurses could 'think like a nurse' and enhance their confidence by gaining experience with patients, being supported by others, and discussing things that happened with their fellow nurses.



Assess: This is a little informal. We need to add the year and make it a complete secondary citation, and change words such as 'things that happened'. We can keep the quotation 'think like a nurse' as long as we retain the quotation marks.

According to Etheridge (2007, as cited in Lewis & Foley, 2014, p. 61), novice nurses can "think like a nurse" and gain confidence if they have experience with different patients, help from colleagues, and discuss experiences with their fellow nurses.

Changes made:

- Added 'according to Etheridge' and formatted this as a secondary citation
 - 'new nurses' to 'novice nurses'
 - 'develop confidence' to 'gain confidence'
- omitted 'in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experience'
 - added conditional 'if' clause
 - 'a wide variety of patients' replaced with 'different patients'
- 'support from educators and experienced nurses' changed to 'help from colleagues'
- 'sharing experiences with their peers' replaced with 'discuss experiences with their fellow nurses'

Sentence 4 from source

Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.

Technical words:

- clinical
- nurse

What is the key idea of this sentence?

It's important to seek opportunities to improve skills during placement to transition from student nurse to novice health professional.



Assess: This is a good summary of the key idea but too many words are similar to the original text. We can also restructure the sentence so the student nurse is at the beginning.

Student nurses should look to improve their clinical skills during placement to assist in the passage to starting work.

Changes made:

- The sentence structure: 'making the most of clinical placements...' does not have a direct subject, only an implied subject. We have rewritten this as an active construction with 'student nurses' as the subject.
- 'Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills' changed to 'look to improve their clinical skills during placement'.
- 'the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner' changed to 'the passage to starting work'.
- the concept that 'making the most' is 'essential' has been changed to improving skills being able 'to assist' in the transition to work. This is an alteration in meaning but only a small one; the key idea of the sentence has still been preserved.

Now let's compare the original text and our paraphrase:

Original text	Paraphrase
<p><i>The challenge for you as a student nurse is to move beyond mastering the skills of data collection to develop your confidence in analysing and interpreting findings, identifying and clustering abnormal data and determining nursing priorities. Although beginning nurses lack the depth of knowledge and expertise that experienced nurses have, they can still learn to improve their clinical judgement skills. Etheridge (2007) found that new nurse graduates learned to "think like a nurse" and develop confidence in making clinical judgements through multiple clinical experiences with a wide variety of patients, support from educators and experienced nurses, and sharing experiences with their peers. Making the most of clinical placements by seeking opportunities to develop these skills is essential in the transition from student nurse to beginning practitioner.</i></p>	<p><i>Student nurses need to progress from collecting data to being confident in analysing data to find abnormalities and prioritise tasks. New nurses do not have much knowledge or experience, but they can still develop their clinical judgement. According to Etheridge (2007, as cited in Lewis & Foley, 2014, p. 61), novice nurses can "think like a nurse" and gain confidence if they have experience with different patients, help from colleagues, and discuss experiences with their fellow nurses. Student nurses should look to improve their clinical skills during placement to assist in the passage to starting work.</i></p>



Assess:

- Have technical words been preserved?
- Are the key ideas of the original text communicated in the paraphrase?
- Is the paraphrase too close to the original or using too many of the same words?
 - Have direct quotes been appropriately referenced?
- Is the paraphrase a cohesive and clear piece of writing?
 - Would you make any changes?

Integrating paraphrases into your writing

Now that we've made a paraphrase of the source, how do we use it?

Imagine that you're writing an essay. The topic is:

'Describe some of the challenges faced by student nurses, and ways that these challenges can be overcome.'

You have decided to discuss the essay topic in two parts: clinical challenges and personal challenges.

This is an example of how we can use our paraphrase of the paragraph in Lewis & Foley (2014) to discuss clinical challenges:

Student nurses face multiple challenges in the clinical environment, but they are not impossible to overcome. Lewis and Foley (2014) note that new nurses do not have much knowledge or experience, but they can still develop their clinical judgement. Improvement can come from many avenues. According to Etheridge (2007, as cited in Lewis & Foley, 2014, p. 61), novice nurses can "think like a nurse" and gain confidence if they have experience with different patients, help from colleagues, and discuss experiences with their fellow nurses.

Here we have integrated our paraphrases of sentences 2 and 3 into a coherent paragraph, with a topic sentence and context for the evidence from sources.

More information

- [Western Sydney University Library Referencing and Citation guide](#)
- [Royal Literary Fund: Direct quotation, paraphrasing and referencing](#)
- [The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: Quotations](#)

References

Lewis, P., & Foley, D. (2014). *Health assessment in nursing*. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer / Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.