How can I use other people's ideas in my writing?

'If I have seen a little further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.'

Sir Isaac Newton

A Reflection

Thinking about your current practice, which of the following statements are true for you?

Statement	True	False
'I find it difficult to include a range of sources in my work.'		
'I do not understand the difference between quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing.'		
'I often use long quotations (more than 25 words).'		

B Contextualization

How does the passage on the right use other people's ideas?

• *Consider the improvements in comparison with the passage on the left. What strategies were used?*

Passage using only the student's ideas

The term paraphrasing is generally not understood very well. It is normally understood as meaning a mixture of quotations, summary and paraphrase. Many people think that paraphrasing, summarizing and quotation are skills that students can use when using original material in their writing. The large amount of information which is available both on the Internet and in books, and which university students can access, shows the importance of paraphrasing – in particular, how paraphrasing can be used to avoid plagiarism.

Passage incorporating other people's ideas

Typically, paraphrasing is discussed as part of a 'triadic model' of 'paraphrase, summary, and quotation' (Barks and Watts, 2001: 252). For example, Campbell (1990) and Johns and Mayes (1990) suggest that paraphrasing is one of a number of strategies (including summary and quotation) that students can use when integrating source texts into their writing ... The ubiquitous online and paper writing resources available to university students also emphasize the importance of paraphrase, specifically as a strategy for avoiding plagiarism (Yamada, 2003).

Keck, C. (2006). The use of paraphrase in summary writing: A comparison of L1 and L2 writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*. 15, 4: 261–278.

c Analysis

What are some of the basic skills when quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing?

Understand why a range of sources is important

This is a common problem for many students, whether native or non-native speakers of English. Since non-native speakers will often take a long time to read and understand source materials, it is common to find only two or three sources used in an essay. However, your teachers may expect you to use 8–10 sources, or possibly more.

> **Two important points:**
> - You do not need to read all of your reading list.
> - You do not need to understand everything in every source.

When using sources, you need to achieve a balance between breadth and depth. If you are inexperienced in reading, this can be very challenging. To do this, you need to adopt a range of strategies, including the ability to reflect upon and criticize writing (see Step 8) and to carry out targeted, critical reading, whereby you focus only on the information you need (see Step 9).

Ensure that you understand the difference between the three skills

Note: the specific referencing conventions for quotations, paraphrases and summaries are discussed in Step 5.

- **Direct quotation** is when you use exactly the same words as somebody else:
  Typically, paraphrasing is discussed as part of a 'triadic model' of 'paraphrase, summary, and quotation' (Barks and Watts, 2001: 252).

- **Paraphrasing** is when you rewrite text from another piece of writing, using your own words:
  The ubiquitous online and paper writing resources available to university students also emphasize the importance of paraphrase, specifically as a strategy for avoiding plagiarism (Keck, 2006).
  The original text (Yamada, 2003: 249) was as follows: 'The information in these sites is usually electronic versions of writing manuals or handouts distributed by these colleges.'

- **Summarizing** is when you condense whole paragraphs, pages, articles or even books down to a single sentence:
  Campbell (1990) and Johns and Mayes (1990) suggest that paraphrasing is one of a number of strategies (including summary and quotation) that students can use when integrating source texts into their writing.

Be careful about the length of quotations which you use

Often, students use long quotations because it is an easy way to increase their word count. Wherever possible, this should be avoided. Long quotations give the impression that the student cannot think critically and is unable to separate what is useful from what is not. Many quotations will be fewer than ten words. As a general rule, you should justify any quotation which is longer than 15 words. Ask yourself:

- Do I *really* need all the words?
- What is *essential* in this quotation?
- Might *paraphrasing* or *summarizing* be a better option?

How can these skills improve your writing?

Quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing can be beneficial to your writing in three main ways: they add **clarity**, **authority** and **support**.

- **Clarity**: Experts in the field may often be able to say things in a more specific, precise way than you.

- **Authority**: As the quotation by Sir Isaac Newton at the beginning of this step suggests, a good essay will build on the work of experts in the field. Also, you need to demonstrate that you have a good overall understanding of the topic, and that you are considering the issues from all angles.

- **Support**: A good balance of theory and evidence is required in academic writing. Published works can add relevant support to your own thoughts and reflections about a particular subject.

What different strategies are there for paraphrasing?

There are two key strategies for successful paraphrasing: changing the words and changing the grammar. In both cases, the *idea* should remain the same, but the specific *detail* should be different. Often both strategies will be used together, i.e., a good paraphrase will often involve changes to both the words and the grammar.

Strategy 1: Changing the words

Replacing words from the original text with SYNONYMS is the simplest and most common way to paraphrase. However, note that synonyms do not mean *exactly the same* as each other. They only have a *similar* meaning. You must be careful not to misrepresent somebody's opinion by poor use of synonyms.

In the example from page 20, the following changes were made:

Yamada (2003)	Keck (2006)
electronic	online
writing manuals or handouts	paper writing resources
distributed by these colleges	available to university students

Where can I find synonyms?

- Microsoft Word thesaurus (shift F7)
- A synonyms dictionary
- A range of websites, e.g.:
  www.thesaurus.com
  www.wordsmyth.net

Strategy 2: Changing the grammar

Altering the grammar in the original text can be done in two main ways: changing the VOICE (either active into passive, or vice versa) and changing the WORD CLASS. In both cases, the emphasis of the original may change slightly. For example, an alternative way of paraphrasing Yamada (2003) would be as follows:

- Original: The information in these sites is usually electronic versions of writing manuals …

- Paraphrase: The usual site information is electronically produced writing manuals (Yamada, 2003).

D Activation

Paraphrase the following sentences, each of which is taken from Keck (2006).

1. 'Such investigations are likely to play a crucial role in our larger efforts to help university students become confident and successful academic writers.'

_____

_____

2. 'The study aimed to establish a reliable, replicable method.'

_____

_____

3. 'Many believe that the teaching of paraphrasing can help students to move beyond copying as a textual borrowing strategy.'

_____

_____

4. 'Judgments of paraphrase acceptability depend upon a number of factors, including, but not limited to, the length of the borrowed phrase, word frequency, and the grammatical structure of the paraphrase.'

_____

_____

E Personalization

- ◼ **Consider your most recent piece of academic writing and the ways in which you used other people's ideas.**
- ◼ **Look at your references:**
  - How many sources did you use? Was this sufficient?
  - Do your sources reflect a variety of opinions on the subject?
- ◼ **Look at the direct quotations:**
  - What percentage of the essay did they take up?
  - Were there any which were longer than 15 words? If so, can you justify them?
- ◼ **Look at the paraphrasing:**
  - Were they genuine paraphrases, or did you just copy and paste?

F Extension

- ◼ Step 5 provides guidance on how to **reference** properly.
- ◼ Step 8 helps you develop your **critical thinking skills**, to decide what part of other people's writing you should use in your own writing.
- ◼ Step 31 provides guidance on ways in which you can **report** what other people have written about a particular subject.
- ◼ Appendix 3, Step 4 lists an analysis of the different word classes of common academic words and the passive forms of English tenses. This information may be useful when paraphrasing.