

PARAPHRASING

A paraphrase is a “rewording” of an original line taken from a document. Instead of quoting, which is taking the text from the document exactly as it was written, one simply places the idea (from the original text) into one's own words.

Example:

Take a moment to read this early Christian text:

“Give us this day our daily bread....”

Ask yourself for a moment: What does this really mean? Also, how might you clarify its meaning to an audience?

To paraphrase means to express (or reiterate) the meaning of something using different words in order to achieve greater clarity and context. Interestingly, this definition is paraphrased from the Oxford English Dictionary, which originally states, “Paraphrase [verb] - express the meaning of (the writer or speaker or soemtinignr written or spoken) using different words, especially to achieve greater clarity.”

Back to the line:

The line is something called a metonym (a substitution of a concept for something closely related). Thus, “Daily bread” actually means “everything we need everyday” or “the essentials of life.”

“Give us this day our daily bread” (taken word-for-word from the Holy Christian Bible) really means to provide the essential things we need everyday. As using Metonyms was a tradition in early Christian and Roman texts, the line cannot be taken completely literally.

So, rather than quote the line, you can put the line into your own words to add greater clarity and meaning, even context.

Context refers to the circumstances or facts surrounding a situation or an event. We sometimes refer to context as the background for the quote.

A few additional things we can do with a paraphrase is include the background.

Rather than say:

The Holy Bible implores us to ask the almighty or God to provide the essential things we need everyday.

We can say:

A line from the Holy Bible, which originates under the work usually called the Lord’s Prayer (a traditional prayer in Christianity) asks believers to implore God to provide the essential things that they need everyday.

Noticed how this new line provides context (or the circumstances of the information) as well as the information itself.

In order to paraphrase material, you can do the following:

* You can add words, subtract words, or substitute (new words for the old words).* You can elaborate on ideas (within the context of the original lines).

* You can reorder the words.

* You can fully control the expression of the original idea in your own work.

Note: Regardless of what you do, you must attempt to preserve the original and intended message of the author. However, you don't have to use the author's exact words.

In some cases, you can change a few words and consider it a paraphrase, although typically your professors will probably like it much more if you change most of the words/phrases from the original line. And, if you add the context or background of the line (or even details about the author), your audience will be very appreciative.

Example:

Author Robert Heinlein wrote in his book *A Stranger in a Strange Land*, "Love is a condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own."

The paraphrase of this line might be:

In "*A Stranger in a Strange Land*," Heinlein wrote that when the happiness of another person is essential to your own happiness, you experience the condition of love.

Notice how the words are changed around (the ideas are inverted and some of the words are changed). That's paraphrasing!