



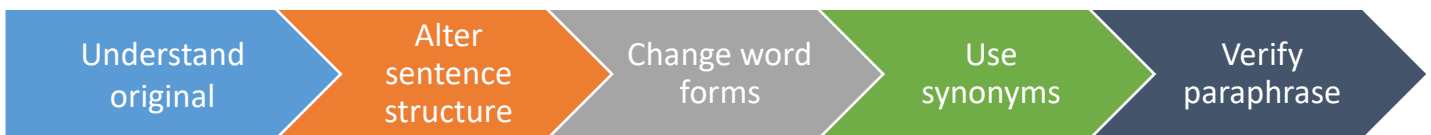
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## PARAPHRASING STRATEGIES

One of the most important skills that any technical writer must acquire is the ability to use original language to describe the thoughts, findings, and conclusions of other authors when writing an academic paper. This skill is known as paraphrasing, and it is challenging for both native English speakers and those who have learned English as an additional language. This document is a step-by-step guide to help writers paraphrase effectively, thus avoiding plagiarism.

## PARAPHRASING

In technical writing, it is often required to take information from elsewhere and include it in a new document. This information must be cited to acknowledge that it is from another source (see [Citing and Referencing](#)). In most cases, this information will also need to be paraphrased so that it is not an exact or near-exact copy of the original. Here is a graphical representation of the process:



This document uses an example sentence and demonstrates how it gradually transforms into an effective paraphrase:

### EXAMPLE SENTENCE

*Although the work environment is considered by many analysts to be unhealthy, the company has had very little staff turnover since the mid-1990s.*

*(Gernet, 2017, p.2)*

## STEP ONE: UNDERSTAND THE ORIGINAL SENTENCE

This is a crucial step in the process, and it is one that is often forgotten. Some writers begin paraphrasing without true comprehension of the source. What often happens in such a case is the “paraphrased” sentence ends up having a different meaning than the original. Shifting words around in a sentence (especially when using passive) can lead to vast differences in meaning, and this is likely to occur if the word order is changed without any understanding of what the original passage means. Another common problem is that synonyms for words might be used, but the meaning of the synonym might not match the context of the sentence because it the synonym is for an alternate definition of the word.

### INCORRECT PARAPHRASE 1

According to Gernet (2017), although many analysts are considered to be unhealthy by the work environment, staff had the company since the mid-1990s.

### INCORRECT PARAPHRASE 2

According to Gernet (2017), although the work countryside is considered by many analysts to be sick, the company has had tiny staff pastry since the mid-1990s.

## STEP TWO: ALTER THE SENTENCE STRUCTURE

This is another vital step because it will make the paraphrase appear distinct from the original. A common mistake is that writers attempt to begin by using synonyms, completely skipping this step. The new sentence would then be considered plagiarism rather than a true paraphrase because it is too similar to the original.

Certain words and expressions make the task of changing the structure of the sentence easy to accomplish. Firstly, when time phrases are used, they can often be moved elsewhere in a sentence with no change in meaning. Secondly, subordinating conjunctions (e.g., *because, if, when*) typically create sentences with two clauses that can be easily inverted. Additionally, the subordinating conjunctions can often be converted into coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *but, so, and*) or conjunctive adverbs (e.g., *however, therefore, consequently*) to enhance the originality of the paraphrased sentence. This could require combining or splitting sentences. Thirdly, using the active instead of the passive (or vice versa) can change the order of both the subject and the object. **Remember that just changing the order of the sentence without changing anything else would still lead to a plagiarized sentence.**

### UNFINISHED PARAPHRASE 1

According to Gernet (2017), although the work environment is considered by many analysts to be unhealthy, since the mid-1990s the company has had very little staff turnover.

### UNFINISHED PARAPHRASE 2

Gernet (2017) states that since the mid-1990s the company has had very little staff turnover in spite of a work environment that many analysts consider to be unhealthy.

## STEP THREE: CHANGE WORD FORMS

After the structure of the new sentence is decided, it can be made more distinct from the original by changing word forms. This will likely involve further changing the structure of the sentence, and generally changing one word form will require other word forms to change as well. The reason that word form changes should be done before using synonyms is that using synonyms first could lead to a situation whereby the new synonyms cannot fit in the restructured sentence because the selected synonym does not have the word form that is required for the sentence.

### UNFINISHED PARAPHRASE 3

Gernet (2017) states that since the mid-1990s the company has had very little turnover of staff in spite of the fact that various analyses of the work environment have demonstrated its unhealthiness.

## STEP FOUR: USE SYNONYMS

Although this is often thought of as the most important step because a paraphrase cannot contain all the exact same words as the original, it really should be done only after the sentence structure is finalized. As mentioned in step one, ensure that the synonym matches the meaning of the word in the context of the sentence. A common mistake is for students to just pick a random synonym from the dictionary without considering the meaning of the sentence. Also, the use of antonyms (opposite meanings) can be helpful.

## FINISHED PARAPHRASE 1

Gernet (2017) states that from the mid-1990s onward, the firm has had very few employees leave in spite of the fact that various analyses of the working conditions have demonstrated their unhealthiness.

## FINISHED PARAPHRASE 2

Gernet (2017) states that from the mid-1990s onward, the firm has had very few employees leave in spite of the various analyses of the working conditions that show that the environment is simply not healthy for workers.

## ALTERNATE (AND BETTER) STEPS TWO TO FOUR: WRITE A COMPLETELY NEW SENTENCE

Many writers are focused so much on having a sentence that matches the original that they do the previous steps 100% of the time. This is understandable, and it does help avoid plagiarism. However, an approach that circumvents the crutch of changing individual words and phrases, thus leading to a completely original sentence, is by trying to rephrase the entire idea. Disregard the words that are used in the original and write a sentence that contains the same basic concept. It does not have to have all the same words and phrases as long as the overall meaning is the same. Compare the original with this new sentence:

### ORIGINAL

Although the work environment is considered by many analysts to be unhealthy, the company has had very little staff turnover since the mid-1990s.

### NEW SENTENCE

Employees have rarely left the company from the mid-1990s onward, even though various sources have suggested that the working conditions are poor (Gernet, 2017).

Note in the new sentence that no attempt was made to replace the previously unreplaced term turnover with a single synonym. Instead, the idea was replaced by a similar idea. Additionally, the word unhealthy was replaced with an idea that the working environment was poor. On its own, the sentence could mean that the environment causes disease or that other employees or work conditions lead to stress. Because it is not clear, a more general term was used.

## STEP FIVE: VERIFY THE PARAPHRASE

Similar to what was done in the previous section, paraphrases need to be checked after they are written. There are two main characteristics to check for: faithfulness and originality. For the former, the meaning of the new sentence must not deviate from the intended meaning of the original. Some ideas in the original might not be in the new sentence, and that is acceptable. However, the paraphrase cannot have a meaning that contradicts the cited sentence.

In terms of originality, the paraphrase must be examined alongside the original to ensure that there is not excessive repetition of language or grammatical structures. The table is just for illustrative purposes and need not be done when reviewing. Both are dissimilar enough to be considered adequate paraphrases.

Original	Five-step Paraphrase	Idea Paraphrase
<p>Although the work environment is considered by many analysts to be unhealthy, the company has had very little staff turnover since the mid-1990s.</p> <p>Yellow = identical Green = word form change</p>	<p>Gernet (2017) states that from the mid-1990s onward, the firm has had very few employees leave in spite of the various analyses of the working conditions that show that the environment is simply not healthy for workers.</p>	<p>Employees have rarely left the company from the mid-1990s onward, even though various sources have suggested that the working conditions are poor (Gernet, 2017).</p>