

THE PARAPHRASE

A **paraphrase** is a restatement of someone else's ideas written in your own words. A paraphrase states fully and clearly the meaning of a complex piece of writing. Because a paraphrase often includes your interpretation of complicated phrases and ideas, it can actually be longer than the original. A paraphrase is used to clarify the meanings of poems, proverbs, legal documents, and any other writing that is symbolic or especially difficult.

“Nothing Gold Can Stay” by Robert Frost

Original

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower,
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
Nothing gold can stay.

Paraphrase

The first growth of spring is more gold in color than green.
But this golden shade of green doesn't last very long.
The first leaf is actually a blossom or a flower,
but it remains for only a very short time.
Then the buds and blossoms give way to full, green leaves.
So day is taken away by the night.
Nothing in nature--especially those things most beautiful--
last forever.

THE PRÉCIS

A **précis** is perhaps the most useful kind of summary writing for general studying. A précis is a summary in your own words of something you have just read. You select only the most important ideas and combine them into clear, concise sentences. A précis of a paragraph for example, may be only one sentence long. In most cases your précis should be no more than one-third as long as the original. Follow the guidelines below whenever you need to write a summary of something you have read.

Guidelines for Writing a Précis

1. Skim the selection to get the overall meaning.
2. Reread the selection carefully, paying particular attention to key words and phrases. (Check the meaning of any words with which you are unfamiliar.)
3. List the major ideas on your own paper.
4. Quickly skim the selection a final time so that you have the overall meaning clearly in mind as you begin to write.
5. Write a summary of the major ideas, using your own words except for those “few” words in the original that cannot be changed. Keep the following points in mind as you write your précis:
 - a. Your opening (topic) sentence should be a clear statement of the main idea of the original.
 - b. Stick to the essential information -- names, dates, times, places, and similar facts are usually essential. Examples, detailed data, and adjectives are usually not essential.
 - c. Try to state each important idea in one clear sentence.
 - d. Arrange your ideas into the most logical order, and link your sentences with effective connecting words so that your précis becomes a complete paragraph in itself.
 - e. Use vivid, efficient words that keep the précis to no more than one-third the original's length.
 - f. Use a concluding sentence that ties your points together and brings your summary to an effective end.
6. Check your précis for accuracy and conciseness by rereading the original passage and comparing it thought for thought with your précis. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. Have I kept the original writer's point of view in my précis?
 - b. Have I cut or compressed the supporting details contained in the original?
 - c. Could another person get the main idea of the original selection by simply reading my précis?
7. Proofread your précis for mechanical errors and overall effectiveness. (Follow the same checklist or proofreading guidelines you use for your paragraph or essay writing.)

Why Paraphrase?

When Benjamin Franklin was a boy, he had to secure his education in large measure through self-teaching. One of his methods of study was to read a passage thoroughly, put the book aside, and rewrite the passage in his own words. Then he would compare his words with the original passage to see if he had interpreted it correctly without omitting anything of importance.

Abraham Lincoln employed a similar method of acquiring his education. "I can remember," he wrote, "going to my little bedroom, after hearing the neighbors talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down, and trying to make out the exact meaning of some of their dark sayings...I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over, until I had put it in a language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend."

As men, both of these "boys" were noted for their ability to write so competently that their sentences form the backbone of any respectable book of quotations.

Note the following lines that could benefit from paraphrase:

1. "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." –Oscar Wilde
2. "Breed is stronger than pasture." –George Eliot
3. "Courage is grace under pressure." –Ernest Hemingway
4. "Doubt is what gets you an education." –Wilson Mizner
5. "The cat in gloves catches no mice." –Benjamin Franklin
6. "Money often costs too much." –Ralph Waldo Emerson
7. "These are the times that try men's souls." –Thomas Paine
8. "An intellectual is a person whose mind watches itself." –Albert Camus
9. "We are drowning in information and starving for knowledge." –Rutherford D. Rogers
10. "There never was a good war or a bad peace." –Benjamin Franklin
11. "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master." –Abraham Lincoln
12. "Applause waits on success." –Benjamin Franklin
13. "There is no little enemy." –Benjamin Franklin
14. "If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest." –Benjamin Franklin
15. "The ballot is stronger than the bullet." –Malcolm X
16. "Music is love in search of a word." –Sidney Lanier
17. "Computers are useless. They can only give you answers." –Pablo Picasso
18. "All the people like us are we, and everyone else is They." –Rudyard Kipling
19. "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." –Mao Tse-tung
20. "Not everybody trusts paintings but people believe photographs." –Ansel Adams
21. "One of the main causes of failure is giving up what you want most for what you want now."
–Jessie Ahroni
22. "Stay hungry. Stay foolish." –Steve Jobs
23. "All books are either dreams or swords." –Amy Lowell
24. "Not all those who wander are lost." –J. R. R. Tolkien
25. "Hate is too great a burden to bear." –Martin Luther King, Jr.
26. "A nickel ain't worth a dime anymore." –Yogi Berra
27. "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle." –Gloria Steinem
28. "The hand is the cutting edge of the mind." –Jacob Bronowski
29. "One man's religion is another man's mythology." –Sandra Effinger
30. "Doneness counts." –Sandra Effinger