How to Paraphrase

**Paraphrasing** is a writing skill in which you “rephrase” (rewrite) information from an outside source in your own words without changing its meaning. Because you include in your rewriting all, or nearly all, of the content of the original passage, a paraphrase is almost as long. When paraphrasing, it is important to avoid *plagiarizing*; that is, writing a paraphrase that is too similar to the original. A paraphrase is unacceptable when it contains the same vocabulary and sentence structure as the original.

The following shows unacceptable and acceptable paraphrases:

**Original passage**

Although language is the main means of communication between peoples, so many different languages have developed that language has often been a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. For many years, people have dreamed of setting up an international, universal language which all people could speak and understand. The arguments in favour of a universal language are simple and obvious. If all people spoke the same tongue, cultural and economic ties might be much closer, and good will might increase between countries (Kispert, 2006, p.302).

**Unacceptable paraphrase**

Language is the *principle* means of communication between peoples. However, because there are numerous languages, language itself has frequently been a barrier rather than an aid to understanding among the world population. For many years, people have envisioned a common universal language that everyone in the world could communicate in. The reasons for having a universal language are clearly understandable. If the same language were spoken by all countries, they would undoubtedly become closer culturally and economically. It would probably also create good will among nations (Kispert, 2006).

**Putting summaries and paraphrases in your own words**

When you summarize or paraphrase, it is not enough to name the source; you must restate the source’s meaning using your own language. You are guilty of plagiarism if you half-copy the author’s sentences – either by mixing the author’s well-chosen phrases without using quotation marks or by plugging your own
synonyms into the author's sentence structure. The previous paraphrase is plagiarized – even though the source is cited – because the language is too close to that of the original source.

To avoid plagiarizing an author’s language, resist the temptation to look at the source while you are summarizing or paraphrasing, therefore:

- Close the source (e.g. book, journal article, website)
- Write from memory or from your notes
- Then open the original source to check for accuracy.

This technique prevents you from being captivated by the words on the page.

**Writing Paraphrases**

**Step 1**
Read the original passage several times until you understand it fully. Look up unfamiliar words, and find synonyms for them. If you need to take notes, write down only one or two words for each idea – not complete sentences. For example, here are one writer’s notes on the original passage:

- Language → people use to communicate → but too many = obstacle
- Dream = international language
- Reasons: cultural, economic bonds, good feelings between countries

It may be helpful to make a brief outline, such as the following:

**A. Language – main means of communication**
- Too many languages
- Universal language needed

**B. Reasons for a universal language**
- Increase cultural, economic bonds
- Increase good feelings between peoples

**Step 2**
Write your paraphrase from memory. Include as much information as you remember. Don’t look at the original while you are writing.

**Step 3**
Check your paraphrase against the original for accuracy and completeness. If necessary add the points that you have missed.

**Step 4**
Name the source of the original passage using APA or MLA Styles.

*Acceptable paraphrase*
According to Kispert (2006), humans communicate through language. However, because there are so many languages in the world, language is an obstacle rather than an aid to communication. For a long time, people have wished for an international language that speakers all over the world could understand. A universal language would certainly build cultural and economic bonds. It would also create better feelings among countries.

Reference