Paraphrasing techniques

The following are methods typically used by skilled writers in paraphrasing and summarizing information cited in their academic papers. Writers generally begin by condensing and restructuring sentences and phrases, and in the process, retaining some information while omitting other information. In the process, they also change content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives) when possible, e.g., by substituting synonyms. As an initial consideration, though, we will also look at verb tenses, as choice of verb tense is a question that novice writers face in academic writing.

1. Selecting and omitting information
When citing and using information from a source for their own academic writings, novice writers may make the mistake of including too much information from the source, including unnecessary details and items that are not relevant to the purpose of the paper. Experienced writers leave out less important information from the source article, such as:

- background information, historical background, or theoretical background that the potential readers would likely know already
- minor details of experimental design and procedures
- statistical results of experiments
- details of the author’s line of reasoning in his/her analysis
- any information that is not relevant to the main point of the writer’s paper

Instead, the main findings, conclusions, or implications are usually the focus of the summarized / paraphrased information. Based on what is included or omitted, writers then condense and restructure sentences.

2. Verb tenses
Think about the verb tenses used in your field in when using information from sources. For each type of section or genre, what function do cited sources play in the paper, and what verb tenses are used when you paraphrase and use information from sources? Note: the tenses that are more commonly used may vary by field.

1. introductions
2. historical background
3. theoretical discussion
4. literature reviews (of past studies & research)
5. research hypotheses or research questions
6. experimental design & procedures
7. experimental results
8. discussion sections
9. literary analysis
10. qualitative analysis of data
11. implications / applications
12. conclusion / summary

1
Why are these tenses commonly used in such sections in your field? The main linguistic functions of these forms are explained below. How are these functions relevant to the verb forms used in writing in your field?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tense</th>
<th>example</th>
<th>function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple present</td>
<td><em>X develops rapidly</em></td>
<td>general or theoretical(^1) statements, assertions, or truths; general beliefs; theoretical claims, or statements within a theoretical context; claims that are generally accepted in a field or theoretical framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>X causes Y</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Present progressive</td>
<td><em>X is developing</em></td>
<td>Present trends, on-going events (not so common in academic writing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(continuous)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td><em>Few studies have examined</em></td>
<td>Showing current relevance of recent past events (recent, from the writer’s perspective); more vivid descriptions of near past events with current consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(present perfect)</td>
<td><em>this issue in detail.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple past</td>
<td><em>The study subjects chose one of the two doors.</em></td>
<td>Specific points in the past; narratives and historical discussion; past research or discoveries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect</td>
<td><em>After they had experimented</em></td>
<td>Completion of one action by a certain date, or in the distant past, relative to other past events (more common in writing than in spoken English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(past perfect)</td>
<td><em>with engines, they went on to try aerodynamics.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td><em>We will study this further</em></td>
<td>Future or expected trends, findings, or events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate future</td>
<td><em>The government is going to have to enact better regulations</em></td>
<td>Intentions; expected actions in the near future (more informal; not very common in academic writing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive verbs</td>
<td><em>The experiment was conducted as follows:</em></td>
<td>Emphasizes actions or events; de-emphasizes or ignores those performing the actions, i.e., the agent or doer (especially common in scientific writing, where the agent is often not important)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>50 subjects were recruited and instructed to...</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>X was found to cause...</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modal verbs</td>
<td><em>can, may, might, should, must...</em></td>
<td>Potentiality, possibility, hypothetical situations, uncertainty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) ‘Theory’ does not necessarily mean ‘not proven’ or ‘not true,’ especially in academic contexts. In science and other fields, a theory is an explanatory framework, a set of claims or propositions designed to explain something, as opposed to a ‘law’ or ‘rule’, which are simple descriptive statements.
3. Pronouns and reformulation expressions

Consider the following options for completing this paragraph\(^2\). Which sound better?

In the past, flood impact assessments have focused primarily on the economic losses resulting from a flood. Now, however, emphasis is also being placed on potential environmental benefits.

a. It will result in a more complete picture of the gains of losses from a flood.
b. This will result in a more complete picture of the gains of losses from a flood.
c. This expansion will result in a more complete picture of the gains of losses from a flood.
d. This expansion of focus will result in a more complete picture of the gains of losses from a flood.
e. This expansion in assessment focus will result in a more complete picture of the gains of losses from a flood.
f. This expansion in assessment with regard to flooding will result in a more complete picture of the gains of losses from a flood.

What are possible ways of completing these items\(^3\)?

1. Haigney concludes from his study that driving performance decreases when drivers use their cell phones. _____ is consistent with recent reviews of the literature on driving distractions.

2. Although it seems that the construction of new roads and widening of existing roads should reduce traffic congestion, recent research has shown that these activities actually lead to increases in traffic. _____ is known as the “induced traffic” effect.

This is often used as a reformulation marker instead of repeating a noun phrase; in such cases, this sounds better in formal English than it – as in this situation / event / condition / fact. One may use this, or this plus a contextually appropriate word (this situation / difficulty / view / finding / process / etc.).

4. Content words

Content words are those that carry the main meaning or content of a sentence – nouns, main verbs, adjectives, and major adverbs. Other, more minor words are known as function words. Often, entire sentences or ideas can be summarized with a few content words. Some content words can be replaced with synonyms or other expressions.

4.1. Synonyms

As much as possible, experienced writers replace content words with synonyms, particularly important nouns and verbs, along with condensing and restructuring sentences. Being able to use synonyms requires a good knowledge of vocabulary\(^4\), and

\(^2\) Exercise from Swales & Feak (2004:37).
\(^3\) From Swales & Feak (2004:35-36).
\(^4\) There is no simple or easy way to build vocabulary knowledge. The best method is probably doing a lot of reading in one’s own field, and reading in other fields, as well as more general forms of reading, and doing so regularly and over a long period of time.
sometimes, a good thesaurus\(^5\).

However, many field-specific terms – i.e., nomenclature, jargon, specific terminology, technical terms, and such – often have no appropriate synonyms and cannot be changed. Also, the use of synonyms varies from field to field. In many science and related fields, the writing style is dense and technical, and it is difficult to use synonyms, so key words may simply be repeated regularly.

### 4.2. Serial verb phrases

Several sentences can be condensed into one sentence with multiple verb phrases.

They observed English classes at a number of secondary schools in Seoul, coded the teacher and student behavior, and administered questionnaires to the students.

### 4.3. Passive verbs

Passive verbs put more emphasis on what was done or what happened, and leaves out the agents or doers of the action. Thus, longer descriptions of “X did ...” and “we did ...” and such can be reworded more succinctly as “X was done, and Y was performed.”

English teachers were recruited, their English classes at various schools were observed, teacher and student behaviors were coded, and questionnaires were administered to the students.

### 4.4. Reporting verbs

Reporting verbs indicate cited information and ideas, e.g.\(^6\):

X suggests / reported / observed / recommends / implied / etc.

### 4.5. Attributive\(^7\) adjectives

Some information can be reduced to descriptive adjectives and noun phrases.

A standard counterbalanced experimental design was used. [substituting for several sentences describing how the experiment was done]

This recent proposal...

Such economic disparity...

### 5. Nominalizations [명사화, 名詞化]

Entire phrases, ideas and even sentences can often be reduced to shorter noun phrases or even single nouns, and this is common in technical and academic writing. For example:

a. Obviously the government is concerned about some users’ reactions to its move to impose restrictions on Internet usage.

This version (a) is appropriate for academic writing, and is denser than the more colloquial version in (b):

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5 Thesaurus: a synonym dictionary; the best one is [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com).

6 For more on the grammatical patterns of such verbs, see the longer reporting verb handout at [http://www.bit.ly/kentlee7 > 'Writing aids'].

7 Attributive adjective [한정적 형용사]: An adjective placed directly before and directly modifying a noun (e.g., ‘a successful experiment’), cf. a predicate adjective [술부 형용사] after a linking verb (‘the experiment was successful’).
b. Obviously the government is concerned about how some users will react if it tries to impose restrictions on Internet usage.

Also compare, e.g:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>simple</th>
<th>nominalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The military invented the ARPANET, which allowed people to disseminate information like never before</td>
<td>The military's invention of the ARPANET revolutionized the dissemination of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they applied...; how they applied...; where they applied...</td>
<td>their application of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how we directed; the direction that our research took</td>
<td>the direction of our research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Foregrounding and backgrounding

Some material can be summarized more briefly, and also phrased in certain grammatical structures to de-emphasize it (backgrounding), so that it leads up to the more important content; the more important information can be put in a main clause for more emphasis. Subordinate clauses are particularly useful for backgrounding less critical information to connect with and lead up to important information in the main clause.

6.1. Prepositional phrases

For the sake of equity and fairness in educational opportunities, students are randomly assigned to a school in their district, and teachers are regularly rotated among schools throughout the metropolitan area.

6.2. Participle phrases

Finding past motivation studies based solely on questionnaire data inadequate, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) used a hybrid observational and survey study paradigm.

6.3. Infinitive and gerund phrases

To provide equal educational opportunities, ...

Implementing a rotation system was found to be effective...

6.4. Subordinate clauses

Although they decided upon a one-factor solution based on the PCA results, the second eigenvalue may be too close to significance to dismiss right away.

Since they found past studies based solely on questionnaire data inadequate, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) decided on a hybrid observational and survey study paradigm.

6.5. Resumption markers

Occasionally, a writer needs to repeat familiar information, e.g., [1] to remind the reader of something mentioned previously, in order to return to a previous topic or line of thought; or [2] to remind the reader of fairly familiar information in order to segue into a
new line of reasoning or topic. The potential repetitiveness of kind of topic shift is “hedged” or marked with a subordinating conjunction (Although X has argued at length that...) or a resumption marker (as mentioned, the aforementioned X, as regards, as to, regarding). The information should not be overly familiar, and it should be stated as concisely as possible to avoid being too redundant. In formal writing, the phrases as regards, as to, as for, regarding should not be used too often, as this can sound colloquial or redundant.

As discussed in the previous section, many physicists have pointed out serious side effects, even fatal risks, of warp drive engines. However, we would like to propose alternatives to the warp drive that would avoid these dangers.

7. Transitionals

As above, transitional or connective words not only facilitate logical flow and connections among ideas, phrases, and clauses, but they also can help to manage the information being cited.

Some have claimed that theory Y offers a better explanation than theory X. For example, Smith (2008) found that... Further evidence is offered by Jones (2009), who observed that... In fact, most recent studies have provided stronger evidence for Y.

Since they found past studies based solely on questionnaire data inadequate, ...

Sometimes it is necessary to critique, criticize, or take issue with others’ claims or findings. Contrastive connectives like however, although, whereas and others can help to frame such information and distinguish between the cited information and your own critique.

Although they decided upon a one-factor solution based on the PCA results, the second eigenvalue may be too close to significance to dismiss right away.

The researchers reported the results of a factor analysis of the survey data, and concluded that one underlying factor (a general class motivation factor) was apparent from the survey data. However, their reported eigenvalue of 1.8 for the first factor was twice the value for a possible second factor” – yet a second factor of c. 0.9 might also be significant.

8. Citation systems

In using sources, we cite the source in the body of the paper itself, the so-called in-text (or inline) citation, as in this example in the APA citation system, which is used in the social sciences.

To this effect, we designed a highly structured observation scheme following the model of Spada and Fröhlich’s (1995) COLT.

In the humanities, the MLA or Chicago systems are often used, which also have author and year in parentheses. In some science and engineering fields, in-text numbering systems like IEEE or CBE are used, which look more like this, or with the numbers in superscript, which correspond to the numbered references at the end of the paper.

These radiation effects pose serious problems for warp drive propulsion (1). Similarly, Odie et al. (2) report a detailed experiment that tested the assumption that ...

8 These may be called transitionals, transition words, connectors, connectives, etc., and are used to connect words, clauses, ideas, and sentences. These include coordinating conjunctions (as, so, and, but), subordinating conjunctions (since, because, although), conjunctive adverbs (therefore, furthermore) and other words. For lists and handouts on transitionals, see my website, and look under ‘Writing aids’: http://www.bit.ly/kentlee7.
The large-scale use of dilithium crystals as a warp-drive fuel source is still problematic due to production issues\textsuperscript{1,2}. Specifically, Kirk\textsuperscript{3} reports molecular disintegration in the pre-production process …

For longer discussion of a source, we often cite it at first, followed by several phrases or sentences of continuous discussion of the same source(s), until a transitional word signals (e.g., thus, that is, as a result, or many others) a shift to the writer’s own comments or critique, or to discussion of another source.

A recent study by Smith (2008) confirms the validity of this approach. This study was conducted … [blab blab blab] …. Another study by Jones (2009) replicated the Smith study with an enhanced experimental design to further confirm this effect. The Jones study … [blab blab blab] …. More recently, Fink (2010) and Stein (2010) conducted a similar experiment with … [blab blab blab] …. Thus, the preponderance of the evidence confirms the X approach, and disconfirms theory Y.

Finally, the end of the paper contains a so-called references or works cited section (‘works cited’ is more common in the humanities) listing full bibliographic information for the works cited. Information on how to use these systems can be found on the web sites of the professional organizations that developed them, or on other websites with academic writing aids, which you can find from a Google search\textsuperscript{9}.

\textsuperscript{9} For APA and MLA, a good place to start is the Purdue English Online Writers’ Lab: owl.english.purdue.edu.