Learning to Paraphrase

A paraphrase is...

- Your own version of essential information and ideas expressed by someone else, presented in a new form.
- One legitimate way (when accompanied by accurate citing) to borrow from a source.
- A way to avoid quoting too much.

Students find paraphrasing difficult because:
- They try to paraphrase a text even though they might not completely understand the content.
- They don’t effectively use a dictionary or thesaurus to help them.

Paraphrasing for an Essay

One strategy that might make the job of paraphrasing a lot easier is:

1. When you are at the note-taking stage of your research, and you come across a passage that may be useful for your essay, do not copy a text that may be useful for your essay unless you think you will want to quote it.
2. If you think you will want to paraphrase from the text, make a note only of the author's basic point or try to summarize the main point of the passage into one or two sentences. Then try to write about how that idea relates to your approach to your research topic.
3. In your notes, you should already be changing the language of the original into your own words. It is only important that you keep the original idea.
4. Make sure to write down the information you need to cite the source.

When you write your essay, use your notes instead of the original. You will find it much easier to avoid copying from the original text because you will not have recently seen it. Then:

1. Change the ideas from your notes into ideas that work with your developing paper.
2. Provide a reference.
3. Go back to the original to ensure that (a) your paraphrase is accurate and (b) you have truly said things in your own words.

Adapted by Melissa McLeod 2011 from:
http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/paraphrase.html
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/01/
Examples of good and bad paraphrasing

The original passage:
Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final research paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes. Lester, James D. Writing Research Papers. 2nd ed. (1976): 46-47.

A legitimate paraphrase:
In research papers students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester, 1976).

In this plagiarized version, the student seems to have gone sentence by sentence, only changing the occasional word instead of only capturing the main ideas:

Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes.

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