



# Effective paraphrasing for postgraduates: video tutorial

<http://www.screencast.com/t/27J2IIIwVEZ>

## Transcript

**Introduction:** Welcome to this tutorial on effective paraphrasing aimed at postgraduate students. This tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace and you can pause it at any time, especially to read the example extracts more closely.

**Slide 1:** It can seem daunting to paraphrase an academic text. Although people often say 'just put it in your own words', this isn't always as straightforward as it sounds. You may have doubts such as distinguishing between your words and theirs; not feeling able to express any ideas any better than they are in the original; or being worried you will change the meaning if you change the words.

**Slide 2:** But the following example will hopefully make the process clearer and more manageable. It will trace a paraphrase in a book chapter back to the original source and ideas in a journal article to show how the paraphrase was constructed.

**Slide 3:** The paraphrase comes from a book chapter aimed at staff teaching Masters courses and looks at interventions and strategies to help sustain students' motivation throughout their Masters degree. The paraphrase reads as follows, 'Often the students who are most able to sustain their motivation through the dissertation process are those who have the intrinsic motivation to know that they must be independent and proactive researchers, but who also have a good wider support network beyond their supervisor so they are not alone in the process'. As the reference shows, these ideas come from an original study by Anderson, Day and McLaughlin.

**Slide 4:** Tracing this back to the original, we can see from the abstract that it is a study investigating students' perceptions of their Masters dissertation process, especially focusing on the sense of individual agency and the network of support that these students have.

**Slide 5:** So looking at the paraphrase in the book chapter, we can identify that the claim that the students who are most able to sustain their motivation are those who have intrinsic motivation can be traced to p.39 of the original study which states that 'intrinsic interests were presented as the primary motivation' for participants on this Masters course.

**Slide 6:** The next statement in the paraphrase, that the students need to be independent and proactive researchers, summarises a number of ideas from p.40 of the study such as the fact that the students were 'self-directed, displayed initiative, took prime responsibility for their tasks, and were self-motivated, committed to an enterprise and persistent'. As you can see all these traits have been summarised concisely in the paraphrase as 'independent and proactive'.

**Slide 7:** The final part of the paraphrase, arguing that successful Masters students also have a good wider support network beyond their supervisor so they are not alone in the process, can be traced to ideas from p.42 of the study which presents the perspective that 'although participants stressed their own agency and responsibility to take the task forward, they were not isolated agents but could in the main rely on support from those around them'. As the example has shown, the ideas used in the book chapter have synthesised a variety of findings from the study from different places within the study.

**Slide 8:** This demonstrates an important point about paraphrasing - it is very hard to paraphrase effectively as you go along, reading line by line, as every idea you encounter seems crucial. And the phrases from the original source naturally stick in your mind. Instead, it is better to read a much larger section of the text which will give you a clearer sense of what ideas are important to your work and some distance to be able to express them more concisely. We saw this in the example, which summarised the many traits of motivated Masters students from the original study with the single phrase 'independent and proactive researchers'. Make sure you give yourself enough time to understand the ideas clearly, as it is far easier to paraphrase effectively if you have the fundamental understanding.

**Slide 9:** If you feel that the ideas in the original text are expressed so well that you simply can't do them justice to put them in your own words, it helps to remember the purpose of your research. In the example, the original study focused on students' perceptions of a specific aspect of their Masters dissertation process, whilst the book chapter used these ideas for a broader purpose to help Masters lecturers sustain their students' motivation throughout their course. You can pause the tutorial here to look at the different purposes more closely.

It is very unlikely that your purpose will exactly match the purpose of the original so you will have a different reason for needing and using the information. This can help to show you what 'angle or slant' you put on the ideas and as a result, the different ways that you might summarise them. This doesn't mean you will be distorting them or misrepresenting the ideas, but applying them to a slightly different context - your own research project!

**Slide 10:** So to summarise, don't try to paraphrase a text line by line. Instead read a larger section and give yourself enough time to be able to understand the ideas and synthesise them into main points. Finally remember the purpose of your research which will guide you in how to use and express the information in your paraphrase. As we have seen paraphrasing is more than just putting it in your own words - it is a complex skill but one that you will develop well with practice.