

Essential Aspects of Academic Practice (EAAP)

Section 3: Approaches to Paraphrasing

The EAAP guides focus on use of citations, quotations, references and bibliographies. It also includes advice and techniques for summarizing and paraphrasing in written documents and oral presentations.

1. Paraphrasing

Even if you paraphrase or summarise and write ideas in your own words, you must include a citation in your text and a reference in your bibliography. You are still basing your ideas on those you have read elsewhere. One of the main problems with paraphrasing and summarising, however, is that you are working with the published ideas of experts in the field. As a result of this it is quite a challenge to interpret complex ideas and write them critically in your own words.

In this section we will look at ways of identifying important ideas, key words that we keep the same and modes of personal expression that we must change. In doing this we can consider which ideas are relevant to your own argument and which ideas can be left out.

Paraphrasing: a conceptual focus on specific ideas in a limited range of issues

Sample text

“Technology and the Internet pose complex challenges for school leaders; these challenges should not be underestimated. While the Internet presents new issues to sort through and new ground to tread, it surely is here to stay. Now is the time to explore the Internet’s potential for meeting the educational needs of diverse groups of students and involving their parents in student achievement. And schools that take command of the Internet as a tool to accomplish overriding goals, such as improving student achievement and galvanizing parental support, will benefit in the long run.”

(National School Boards Foundation, 2000)

The text contains the following language items:

a) Essential information or fixed information points

e.g. “school leaders”, “parents”, “technology”, “internet”, “educational”

- Any attempt to paraphrase these could be misleading as they represent shared knowledge and common points of reference.

b) Cohesive devices

e.g. articles (the/a/an), conjunctions (and/but), prepositions (for/in/of)

- These devices are grammatically dependent and the way you write a text will determine which cohesive devices must be used

c) Descriptive items, adjectives, adverbs, connectives

e.g. “almost all”, “now is the time”, “well into”, “galvanizing parental support”

- These items are distinctively chosen as modes of expression by individual writers. There are a lot of synonyms and antonyms for these points and they should definitely be paraphrased.

Make a list below of any words or expressions you would consider to be essential information, or descriptive items.

Essential information	Descriptive items

Descriptive items from the sample text are in bold and underlined. They should not appear in a paraphrased version of the text.

“Technology and the Internet **pose complex challenges** for school leaders; **these challenges should not be underestimated**. **While** the Internet **presents new issues to sort through and new ground to tread, it surely is here to stay**. **Now is the time to explore** the Internet’s **potential for meeting** the educational **needs of diverse groups** of students and **involving** their parents in student achievement. And schools that **take command** of the Internet as a **tool to accomplish overriding goals, such as** improving student achievement and **galvanizing** parental support, **will benefit in the long run**.”

(National School Boards Foundation, 2000, emphasis added for this example)

It is important to note that we are working with an isolated passage from a bigger published document and it is necessary to read what comes before and what comes after. This will help to contextualise issues. When we paraphrase, we often write texts of similar length, but we connect the ideas to our own, so we do not necessarily use all those ideas. When we do, they look sequentially very close to the original and may be criticised for being too close.

Consider your argument and decide which information is relevant and which can be adapted or omitted. Below are three scenarios where this text could be used as a reference source in an essay.

Scenario A: You are writing an essay on how parents can be involved in their children’s learning and how responsible use of Internet resources may assist in this.

Scenario B: You are writing an essay on how schools are using technology in education and how teachers need to design activities that will help with learning and engagement.

Scenario C: You are writing an essay on how local education authorities view the use of Internet resources in schools with a view to monitoring independent time that children are allowed to work alone or in groups.

Possible paraphrased versions (note the use of the citation in each case).

Possible paraphrase for scenario A:

You are writing an essay on how parents can be involved in their children’s learning and how responsible use of Internet resources may assist in this.

The “Safe and Smart” report (National School Boards Foundation, 2000) identifies some of the implications for working with the needs of children at school. Within this there is the recognition that parents should participate in their children’s learning. If schools can engage with parents and identify specific learning activities and structured use of Internet access time, it will help with social aspects of learning as well as overall academic achievement.

Possible paraphrase for scenario B:

You are writing an essay on how schools are using technology in education and how teachers need to design activities that will help with learning and engagement.

The “Safe and Smart” report (National School Boards Foundation, 2000) identifies a number of crucial concerns for the use of the Internet in education. As a new medium in the development of educational resources and methods, the Internet is a valuable means through which the needs of a wide range of students can be addressed. In addition, it suggests that parents can be increasingly involved in their children’s learning, fostering greater student achievement. Teachers that recognise and participate in the development of such ideas, despite facing some difficulties at the beginning, will contribute positively to increased educational standards on the whole.

Possible paraphrase for scenario C:

You are writing an essay on how local education authorities view the use of Internet resources in schools with a view to monitoring independent time that children are allowed to work alone or in groups.

The “Safe and Smart” report (National School Boards Foundation, 2000) identifies issues that are important to the development of informed policies that will help

schools to use the Internet in classrooms effectively. While it is recognised that schools must embrace technologies, there are a number of concerns about children's security online that must be addressed before it is possible to allow independent learning time in classrooms. It is necessary to discuss these ideas with parents so they can monitor children's time on the Internet in homework activities. This will help with setting achievable targets for educational achievement.

Sequentially the ideas in these paraphrased are relatively close to the original, especially in Argument B. They have connected these ideas, however, to wider concerns that are not directly mentioned in the original. What the reader can see here is the development of ideas that connect to your own argument, rather than a sequence of ideas that relate to the original, do not actually add or interpret those ideas.

Next: EAAP Section 4: Writing a Bibliography

If you cannot find advice on any of the skills you need to develop, send an email with brief description to aberskills@aber.ac.uk / sgiliauaber@aber.ac.uk