

Organizing Information III: Paraphrasing

Students sometimes feel overwhelmed by the large amount of new information presented in their classrooms and textbooks.

- The first step in handling a large amount of information is to reduce the material to its most important parts, by deciding what is important, less important, and unimportant.
- The second step is to organize the important information so that it is easy to study.
 - For help with the first step, see Organizing Information I – III.
 - For help with the second step, see Organizing Information IV – VI.

Paraphrasing is rewriting an author's material in your own words. The material's meaning remains the same; it is only the wording of it that changes. Paraphrasing can help you to know whether or not you have understood what the author means. If you can't put the ideas in your own words, you might need to reread the passage or ask your instructor for clarification.

Here are some suggestions for effective paraphrasing:

1. Take your time. Read slowly and carefully.
2. Read the entire section or passage before writing anything.
3. As you read, pay attention to exact meanings and the relationships among ideas.
4. Paraphrase one sentence at a time.
5. Don't try and paraphrase word for word. Instead, work with key ideas and concepts.
6. Make sure you use a dictionary for words you aren't sure about.
7. Go ahead and cut out information you find unnecessary. Try to rewrite the main ideas in less wordy sentences.

Paraphrasing is a good way to make someone else's way of thinking and writing fit more into your style of thinking. If you can rewrite the material into your own words, you can be sure you understand the information.

Original

Left partially deaf by a childhood inflammation of the mastoid bones, Thomas Edison throughout his life embraced the world of silence, reveled in its space, allowed it to empower him; as much as any man, perhaps, he recognized silence as the territory of inspiration and cultivated its gifts.

--Mark Slouka, "Listening for Silence," *Harper's Magazine*

Paraphrase

Mark Slouka, in his article "Listening for Silence," cites Thomas Edison as an example of a man enriched by his isolation from sound. A childhood problem had damaged Edison's hearing; instead of feeling crippled, Edison appreciated the value of quiet. Silence, Slouka explains, was a necessary source of inspiration for Edison.

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