

PARAPHRASING

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to work with multiple sources. If all you know about a subject is what one source tells you, you're going to have a lot more trouble stepping away from that source and coming up with your own ideas, words, and organization. The bottom line? Use one source and you risk plagiarism; use multiple sources and you're on your way to useful research.

Sometimes, however, you don't have a choice: you really can only find one source for a particular section of your paper. In that case, you need either to quote it directly or to paraphrase it entirely. Paraphrasing means putting the original author's ideas in your own words--and in your own order --entirely. **Don't just use synonyms for many of the original words:** doing so is still plagiarism, and can cause you to fail the assignment and the course.

So how do you paraphrase? One way is by closing the source, pushing it away, and taking out a blank sheet of paper (or computer document). Then, without looking at the source, write down what you have to say about the subject. When you've finished, look at the original again. Does your version start and end with different ideas than your source's? If your source presents one of its ideas as a question, have you resisted the temptation to do the same? If the source makes three main points, have you avoided addressing the same three issues in the same order?

If so, you're ready to look at your version's language. If you've just used two or three of the source's keywords (the words most essential to discussing the subject), you should be OK. If you're still using other words and phrases from the source, though, it's probably time to look at a thesaurus, changing your sentence structure again if necessary.

If you're really having trouble breaking away from the organization and wording of the original passage, try breaking it down into its component ideas. Consider the following passage from William Severini Kowinski's book *The Mall of America*:

Kids spend so much time at the mall partly because their parents allow it and even encourage it. The mall is safe, it doesn't seem to harbor any unsavory activities, and there is adult supervision; it is, after all, a controlled environment. So the temptation, especially for working parents, is to let the mall be their babysitter. At least the kids aren't watching TV.

Now look at the individual ideas, or **kernel sentences**, that this passage contains:

- Kids spend a lot of time at the mall.
- Their parents encourage it.
- The mall is safe.
- Unsavory activities don't happen at the mall.
- The mall is a controlled environment.
- Parents may let the mall babysit kids.
- Working parents are especially tempted.
- Parents think that going to the mall is better for kids than watching TV

Once you've got these kernel sentences, go ahead and experiment with different ways of combining them into new sentences, in different orders. Which ones do you need? Which ones are irrelevant to your writing project? Stay away from the sequence of the original: instead, decide which idea is most important to you. That's probably the one you want to start with. If you can bring in other ideas of your own, so much the better--**so long as you make it absolutely clear which ideas are yours and which are your source's.**

Here are two acceptable ways of reworking the kernel sentences from Kowinski's passage. Notice how each focuses on a different kernel idea, leading to paraphrases that are as different from one another as they are from their source. Note, too, that each one makes sure that the reader sees exactly which ideas come from Kowinski, rather than the paraphraser

■ First Paraphrase

Many parents, especially working parents, are concerned about what their kids are doing with their afterschool hours. Therefore, Kowinski writes, they often let their children go to the mall, where they'll be protected by mall security and kept away from undesirable and potentially dangerous influences. As a bonus, they'll also be active: even window shopping burns more calories than playing videogames or, as Kowinski suggests, watching TV. The end result, Kowinski argues, is that the mall has become a child care solution for many families.

- Changes the organization of the original by starting with the "working parents" idea.
- The first sentence is an idea developed by the paraphraser, so no citation is needed.
- The second sentence is Kowinski's ideas, so the paraphraser says so. The structure of the sentence is basically new, however, and his words "safe" and "unsavory activities" have been reworked.
- Keywords like "parents" and "mall," however, are so essential that you can use them.
- The reference to TV is Kowinski's, so he's cited.
- The last sentence is Kowinski's concept of "babysitting," cited and reworded.

■ Second Paraphrase

The mall is a good place for young people. William Severini Kowinski describes it as "a controlled environment" where many parents feel comfortable sending their children. At the mall, he notes, kids are protected by store and security personnel, and they are kept away from undesirable and potentially dangerous influences.

- Changes the organization of the original by focusing on benefits. This is not Kowalski's idea, so he is not cited.
- Any distinctive word or phrase from the source has to go inside quotation marks.
- This passage focuses on kids, not parents, so it would logically continue not with Kowinski's ideas but with other descriptions of a mall's benefits for kids.