

# Paraphrasing text



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# Introduction

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Reading at university usually leads to writing: for example, an essay, notes for a seminar, or ideas for a presentation. This is really a process of turning reading into 'your own words'. The two main ways of doing this are **paraphrasing** and **summarising**.

In this course you will practise strategies for paraphrasing sentences.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course L185 [\*English for academic purposes online\*](#).

# Learning Outcomes

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After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand the process of paraphrasing
- practise paraphrasing strategies.

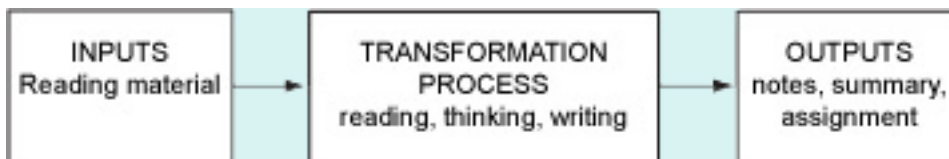
# 1 Activity 1

The following activity uses the text *A force in human history*. Take a moment to read it now.

[View document](#)

## Activity 1 Finding and paraphrasing the main point in a sentence

Much academic study can be seen as a process of turning reading into writing:



Turning reading into 'your own words' is called paraphrasing.

In order to paraphrase a sentence, it is important to recognise the main point of the sentence. Look at the following three sentences and identify the main point in each one. Type your answers into the text box below.

1. AIDS has claimed many lives.
2. By the year 2001, AIDS had claimed over 21 million lives.
3. By the year 2001, AIDS had claimed over 21 million lives, in spite of medical inventions, such as antibiotic therapy and mass vaccination, introduced after World War 2.

*Provide your answer...*

### Answer

In the first sentence, only one point is made: that many people have died of AIDS.

In the second sentence, there is information about time (*by the year 2001*) and about the number of deaths (*over 21 million*). The main point is still that many people have died of AIDS but, depending on what information you need for the task you are doing, the other details may also be important.

In the third sentence, the original main point:

AIDS had claimed (many) lives

is now surrounded by extra detail, such as time:

*By the year 2001, after World War 2*

the number of deaths:

*over 21 million lives*

and information regarding types of medical intervention which have not managed to deal with the problem:

*in spite of medical inventions, such as antibiotic therapy and mass vaccination*



## 2 Activity 2

### Activity 2 Finding the main point in a sentence

Using your mouse, highlight the main point in each of the following sets of three sentences.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

#### Activity 2

### Answer



main point

- 1 HIV has been growing fastest in Europe.
  - 2 You may be surprised to learn that it is in Europe that HIV has been growing fastest.
  - 3 While you might have heard quite a lot about the scale of the crisis in Africa, you may be surprised to learn that HIV has been growing fastest in Europe.
- 1 The number of new infections in Western Europe doubled to more than 365,000.
  - 2 Between 1995 and 2003, the number of new infections in Western Europe doubled to more than 365,000.
  - 3 According to a World Health Organization report published in 2004, between 1995 and 2003, the number of new infections in Western Europe doubled to more than 365,000.
- 1 Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also tackle health issues around the world.
  - 2 Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also tackle health issues around the world, for example the Red Cross and Red Crescent.
  - 3 Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also tackle health issues around the world, for example the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which often step in following earthquakes and other disasters.
- 1 UNAIDS launched the '3 by 5' initiative.
  - 2 In 2001, UNAIDS launched the '3 by 5' initiative with the goal of providing anti-retroviral drugs to 3 million people with HIV/AIDS living in developing countries by 2005.
  - 3 UNAIDS launched the '3 by 5' initiative with the goal of providing anti-retroviral drugs to 3 million people with HIV/AIDS living in developing countries by 2005.

### Comment

This activity shows that sentences can be made up of parts. If a sentence has only one part, it is usually clear what the main point is. If there are more parts, it may not be so clear what the main point is. The main point might be in one of the parts, or it might be in two or more parts combined. If you are paraphrasing, you may have to decide what the main point is depending on why you are paraphrasing.

## 3 Activity 3

### Activity 3 Paraphrasing the main point in a sentence

Identifying the part of a sentence you want to paraphrase may be the first step. The second step is to put it in your own words.

In Activity 2, the main part *AIDS has claimed many lives* was paraphrased as *Many people have died of AIDS*.

Paraphrase the following sentences by changing the words in any way.

#### Activity 3.1

1 HIV has been growing fastest in Europe.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Activity 3.2

2 The number of new infections in Western Europe doubled to more than 365,000.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Activity 3.3

3 Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also tackle health issues around the world.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Activity 3.4

4 UNAIDS launched the '3 by 5' initiative.

*Provide your answer...*

### Answer

Compare your answers with these possible paraphrases.

1. The fastest growth of HIV has been in Europe.
2. There has been a doubling of new infections to over 365,000.
3. Globally, health problems are handled by many NGOs.
4. The '3 by 5' initiative was started by UNAIDS.

### Comment

There are different ways of turning sentences into your own words. Three main ways are using different words that mean the same thing (a synonym), changing the order of the words, or changing the form of the word (for example, *growing* to *growth*).

## 4 Activity 4

### Activity 4 Paraphrasing strategies: synonyms

In this activity you will practise showing your understanding of a word or concept by using a synonym.

Match the meaning of the original word in italics below by selecting the right synonym. When you are working with a text, the synonym you choose will depend on the context. Just looking up words in your dictionary might not work.

#### Question 1

The *impact*

- force
- effect
- shock

Answer

*effect*

#### Question 2

of HIV/AIDS on the economies and hence the political *stability*

- balance
- tendency
- strength

Answer

*balance*

#### Question 3

of heavily affected countries is a major cause for international *concern*

- business
- interest
- worry

Answer

*worry*

#### Question 4

and is a reminder that an infectious disease still has the *potential*

- capability
- amount

- impact

Answer  
*capability*

### Question 5

to alter the course of a country's history. Past epidemics and the long-term impact of diseases have been among the most potent forces shaping the current *global*

- local
- national
- worldwide

Answer  
*worldwide*

### Question 6

distribution of population and cultures. Their influence can be *seen*

- watched
- looked at
- observed

Answer  
*observed*

### Question 7

in the balance of political and economic power in the modern world.

Answer

Here you can see the complete text with the correct synonyms inserted.

The **effect** of HIV/AIDS on the economies and hence the political **balance** of heavily affected countries is a major cause for international **worry** and is a reminder that an infectious disease still has the **capability** to alter the course of a country's history. Past epidemics and the long-term impact of diseases have been among the most potent forces shaping the current **worldwide** distribution of population and cultures. Their influence can be **observed** in the balance of political and economic power in the modern world.

Comment

When you are looking for a synonym, you make decisions about the best choice for the context: for example, using **worry** is more appropriate than **interest**. Although both are synonyms for **concern**, **worry** fits better with the negative tone of the text.

## 5 Activity 5

### Activity 5 Paraphrasing strategies: using logical connectors and reordering sentences

Another way to show your understanding of the original text is to reorder the information in the sentences while still keeping the original meaning. To do this, you may have to use a different type of connector (such as *although*, *because of*, *as a consequence of*) from the original, to convey the same meaning and reword parts of the sentence.

Look at the following pairs of sentences and note how different logical connectors have been used without disturbing the meaning. Note changes in the order and wording.

A **Even though** people in Europe are aware of the need for safer sexual practices to protect against STDs, the evidence shows these are not always followed.

B In Europe, people do not always follow safe sexual practices, **in spite of** their awareness of the risks to health.

A In some countries, deaths through HIV/AIDS are having a negative effect on the economy **because of** the loss of young people from the labour market.

B The economies of some countries are **damaged by** the loss of young workers through AIDS.

Now look at sentences A and B below which are from the original text. Which one of the three alternative sentences is an accurate rewording in each case?

#### Question 1

**A Since the 1980s, infectious disease has re-emerged at the top of the global health agenda, destroying the optimism following World War 2 that modern medical interventions, such as antibiotic therapy and mass vaccination programmes, could eliminate deaths from infection.**

- 1 Because of new medical interventions in developing countries since the 1980s, diseases such as HIV/AIDS have become much more important as a global medical issue.
- 2 In spite of the expectation that medical intervention would solve the problem of infectious disease, in recent decades new diseases such as HIV/AIDS have shown that this is again an important global health issue.
- 3 Although there have been new medical interventions since the 1980s, people still hope that diseases such as HIV AIDS will be eradicated and improve global health.

#### Answer

**A2** The original sentence says that *infectious disease has ... destroyed the optimism that modern medical interventions could eliminate death from infection*. This is a cause–effect relationship. The paraphrasing changes the order. It would be possible to say: *The optimism has been destroyed because of infectious disease*. Instead, *in spite of* is used.

## Question 2

**B Past epidemics and the long-term impact of diseases have been among the most potent forces shaping the current global distribution of population and cultures.**

- 1 As a consequence of global distribution, people live in different parts of the world.
- 2 Because disease has affected many people in the world, their numbers are fewer.
- 3 The effects of disease around the globe have resulted in changes to where people live.

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**Answer**

**B3** The original sentence says that disease has been one of *the most potent forces shaping ...distribution of population*. This makes a cause–effect connection between disease and where people live.

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## 6 Activity 6

### Activity 6 Paraphrasing

#### Question 1

Paraphrase the following extracts from *A force in human history*, using the techniques you have explored in this learning bite

1 Acquired immune deficiency syndrome had already claimed over 21 million lives by the start of 2001, including 4.5 million children.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Question 2

2 The impact of HIV/AIDS on the economies and hence the political stability of heavily affected countries is a major cause for international concern, and is a reminder that an infectious disease still has the potential to alter the course of a country's history.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Question 3

3 Past epidemics and the long-term impact of diseases have been among the most potent forces shaping the current global distribution of population and cultures.

*Provide your answer...*

#### Answer

Compare your paraphrases with the examples below. Did you select the same main points? Did you use more or fewer synonyms? Did you reorder the information more or less? Do you prefer your paraphrases or the ones below? Why?

1. *Over 21 million people had died from AIDS by 2001.* This paraphrase does not include the reference to children. Whether you need to include it will depend on the purpose of the paraphrase you are writing.
2. *There is global concern about the effect of HIV/AIDS on both the economies and the balance of power in the most affected countries.*
3. *Today, the spread of peoples and cultures around the world is largely the result of the effect of epidemics and disease.*





# Conclusion

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How you paraphrase text, and the main points you choose, depends on what your task is and the kind of information you need.

# Keep on learning

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