

How to Write a Seminar Report

Paraphrasing and Summarizing

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January 30, 2013

Abstract. When writing a seminar report, it is necessary to stick more closely to the original and to preserve something of the progression of the argument from the source. The process of reproducing another writer's text in your own words without attempting to reduce the length of the passage substantially is known as *paraphrasing*. If you reproduce another writer's ideas and arguments but at considerably less length and in less detail, then you are *summarizing* it. Details of these processes are described here. Most of the content below is attributed to [1].

1 Paraphrasing

The art of paraphrasing consists of re-creating an original text in its entirety using your own words, not those of the author. It can be particularly useful if your reader might have difficulty in following the original text. Here are some tips for you to produce an effective paraphrase:

- You should, as much as possible, avoid quoting from the original.
- If the author uses a particularly distinctive word or phrase that you wish to retain, then you should put it in quotation marks.
- To avoid the pitfall of plagiarism, you can treat a paraphrase as if it were a piece of reported speech, such as “*X says/states/confirms/expresses/reports that ...*”.
- If the passage has an emotional quality, you can help to convey this by beginning “*X complains/insists/gleefully asserts that ...*”. Similarly, if the author is presenting an argument or responding to arguments put forward by someone else, you can register that fact by saying “*X argues/admits/counters this argument by suggesting that ...*”.

When you have completed a paraphrase, you should always check it against the original to ensure that you have not omitted anything important.

2 Summarizing

Summarizing is another useful skill for researchers. For instance, you can easily find yourself in the position of having to pare down your text to fit the space available (e.g. due to the page-limit of a conference paper). It is also often useful to provide a summary of your argument to wind up a presentation, report, or thesis. Typically, a summary should be between $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the length of the original, suggesting seldom any reason to keep the wording of the original. Here are some tips for you to make an effective summary:

- Read through the whole passage carefully and make sure that you have understood it.
- Identify and note down its main points, the essential ideas or pieces of information that the writer wishes to convey to the reader.
- Sort the main points in the most effective order.
- To fit a large amount of information into succinctly words, you may resort to longer and more formal words and more complex grammatical constructions than you might normally use.
- It is easier to condense a piece of poor writing than a piece of good writing, because poor writing is often loosely structured and padded out with largely irrelevant material or simple verbiage.

Always check your summary for clarity.

References

1. Manser, M., Curtis, S., Pickering, D.: The Facts on File Guide to Good Writing. Checkmark Books (2006)