

Academic Writing: Using Paraphrasing – Arts Subjects

When a marker reads a student essay, he or she will be looking to identify the following:

What has the student quoted?

What has the student paraphrased?

What has the student included that is fact or common knowledge?

(Most importantly) Where is the student's own argument?

Exercise:

Read the following fictitious paragraph from a student essay. Try to identify the function of each sentence. Is it:

- a) quotation
- b) paraphrase
- c) fact / common knowledge in the field
- d) the student's argument

The sentences have been numbered for you in each example.

Example One

[1] In the 19th century, photography was a field in which women were able to excel. [2] Cowen compares the successes of women photographers to women painters, who in the 19th century needed to have formal training in order to learn to paint and be accepted by the artistic establishment.¹ [3] In her article, Cowen explains the success of women in photography by the fact that, in order to take a photograph, one did not have to have formal training. [4] In Cowen's view, this is the reason why "[w]omen produced outstanding achievements in photography almost immediately after the birth of that genre".² [5] Julia Margaret Cameron is one of the most famous women photographers of the 19th century. [6] The story of how she taught herself the art of photography is well known. [7] However, research shows that, like women painters, she too had to work hard in order to be accepted by the artistic establishment. [8] For example, Olsen argues that Cameron was constantly pushing her influential friends to help publicise her photography.³ [9] This shows that although Cameron was working in a completely new medium, her rise to prominence was not a foregone conclusion.

¹ Tyler Cowen, "Why women succeed, and fail, in the arts," *Journal of Cultural Economics* (1996: vol. 20, no. 2), pgs. 93-113.

² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³ Victoria Olsen, *From Life: Julia Margaret Cameron & Victorian Photography* (London: Aurum Press, 2003) p. 158.

Suggested answers to Example One:

- [1] – fact / common knowledge in the field
- [2] – paraphrase of Cowan (with reference to entire article, as the paraphrase is of the argument of the entire article)
- [3] – paraphrase of Cowan (no reference, as the source has just been given and it is clear to the reader)
- [4] – quotation from Cowan (with reference giving exact page number)
- [5] - fact / common knowledge in the field
- [6] – fact / common knowledge in the field
- [7] – student’s argument (containing a paraphrase of Olsen’s research, explained in next sentence)
- [8] – paraphrase of Olsen (with reference to the specific page which student is paraphrasing)
- [9] – student’s argument

Example Two

[1] Women photographers were very successful in the 19th century. [2] For example, Julia Margaret Cameron was a well-known photographer. [3] The story of how she taught herself photography is well-known. [4] One critic shows that she had to ask her influential friends to help her gain publicity for her photography. [5] She was constantly harassing people to help her publicise her work, and sometimes they hesitated. [6] However, in the end she became famous. [7] Cowen writes that:

Women produced outstanding achievements in photography almost immediately after the birth of that genre. Photography was a new art with no academies, no formal schools, and no established techniques. Neither men nor women received special photographic training in their childhood.⁴

[8] Because women did not need to have special training in photography, they were able to train themselves like everyone else. [9] It is obvious that photography was in a different category from painting, for example.

Suggested answers to Example Two:

- [1] – Seems to be intended as a fact, but it is such a vague generalisation that it might well be disputed.
- [2] – fact / common knowledge in the field. [The marker may note that sentence 2 does not fully justify the claims of sentence 1, i.e. just because there is one famous woman photographer from the 19th century doesn’t mean that “women were very successful” in photography at that time.]
- [3] – fact / common knowledge in the field
- [4] – paraphrase – but the marker will want to know what it is a paraphrase of!
- [5] – Is this a paraphrase of the mystery critic from the previous sentence? Confusing.
- [6] – fact / common knowledge in the field
- [7] – quotation from Cowen, with appropriate reference.

⁴ Tyler Cowen, “Why women succeed, and fail, in the arts,” *Journal of Cultural Economics* (1996: vol. 20, no. 2), pg 102.

[8] – It isn't clear whether this is the student's argument, or a paraphrase of Cowen. Confusing.

[9] – On the surface, this looks as if it is meant to be the student's argument. However, if the marker reads (or has read) Cowen's article, he/she will know that this is an unacknowledged paraphrase of Cowen's argument.

In this second example, the marker may well wonder what the student's argument is, and where it is expressed. It is not clear what is a paraphrase of someone else's work – for example, sentences 4 and 5 are taken from Olsen's book – and what is the student's own analysis. Technically, the writer of this example has committed plagiarism (in sentences 4, 5, 8 and 9).