**SUMMARIZING AND PARAPHRASING**

Perhaps the best approach to a fairly difficult essay is, after first reading, to reread it and simultaneously to take notes on a sheet of paper, perhaps summarizing each paragraph in a sentence or two. Writing a summary will help you to

• understand the contents and

• see the strengths and weaknesses of the piece.

Don’t confuse a summary with a paraphrase. A paraphrase is a word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase rewording of a text, a sort of translation of the author’s language into your own. A paraphrase is therefore as long as the original or even longer; a summary is much shorter. A book may be summarized in a page, or even in a paragraph or a sentence. Obviously, the summary will leave out all detail, but — if the summary is a true summary — it accurately states the gist, the essential thesis or claim or point of the original.

Why would anyone ever summarize, and why would anyone ever paraphrase? Because, as we have already said, these two activities — in different ways — help readers follow the original author’s ideas. But, again, summarizing and paraphrasing are not the same.

• **When you summarize,** you are standing back, saying very briefly what the whole adds up to; you are seeing the forest, not the individual trees.

• **When you paraphrase,** you are inching through the forest, scrutinizing each tree — that is, finding a synonym for almost every word in the original, in an effort to make sure that you know exactly what you are dealing with. (*Caution:* Do not incorporate a summary or a paraphrase into your own essay without acknowledging your source and stating that you are summarizing or paraphrasing.)

Let’s examine the distinction between summary and paraphrase in connection with the first two paragraphs of Paul Goodman’s essay, “A Proposal to Abolish Grading,” which is excerpted from Goodman’s book, *Compulsory Miseducation and the Community of Scholars* (1966). The two paragraphs run thus:

Let half a dozen of the prestigious universities — Chicago, Stanford, the Ivy League — abolish grading, and use testing only and entirely for pedagogic purposes as teachers see fit.

Anyone who knows the frantic temper of the present schools will understand the transvaluation of values that would be effected by this modest innovation. For most of the students, the competitive grade has come to be the essence. The naive teacher points to the beauty of the subject and the ingenuity of the research; the shrewd student asks if he is responsible for that on the final exam.

A **summary** of these two paragraphs might run thus:

If some top universities used tests only to help students to learn, students would stop worrying about grades and might share the teacher’s interest in the beauty of the subject.

Now for a **paraphrase**. Suppose you are not quite sure what Goodman is getting at, maybe because you are uncertain about the meanings of some words (perhaps *transvaluation*?), or maybe just because the whole passage is making such a startling point that you want to make sure that you have understood it. In such a case, you may want to move slowly through the sentences, translating them (so to speak) into your own English. For instance, you might turn Goodman’s “pedagogic purposes” into “goals in teaching” or “attempts to help students to learn” or something else. Here is a paraphrase — not a summary but an extensive rewording — of Goodman’s paragraphs:

Suppose some of the top universities — such as Chicago, Stanford, Harvard, and Yale, and whatever other schools are in the Ivy League — stopped using grades and used tests only in order to help students to learn.

Everyone who is aware of the hysterical mood in schools today will understand the enormous change in views of what is good and bad that would come about by this small change. At present, instructors, unworldly folk, talk about how beautiful their subjects are, but smart students know that grades are what count, so they listen to instructors only if they know that the material the instructor is talking about will be on the exam.

**Summarising exercise**

Don’t forget! Your summary should be a brief but informative outline of the original. Check that you've expressed all of the most important points in your own words, and that you've left out any unnecessary detail.

**Original:**

**So how do you go about identifying your strengths and weaknesses, and analyzing the opportunities and threats that flow from them? SWOT Analysis is a useful technique that helps you to do this.**

**What makes SWOT especially powerful is that, with a little thought, it can help you to uncover opportunities that you would not otherwise have spotted. And by understanding your weaknesses, you can manage and eliminate threats that might otherwise hurt your ability to move forward in your role.**

**If you look at yourself using the SWOT framework, you can start to separate yourself from your peers, and further develop the specialized talents and abilities that you need in order to advance your career and to help you achieve your personal goals.**

Your summary: