

Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Basic Study Techniques



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I. Paraphrasing

Two of the English language skills that prospective TOEFL® iBT Test examinees need not only for the test, but also for success in a North American university, are summarizing and paraphrasing. There are numerous methods for interpreting and criticizing texts. Two methods that can help you to *understand an author's meaning* are paraphrasing and summarizing. Both can be essential to the research progress, as well, since research requires you to represent accurately what others have had to say. It's worth remembering that when you do either in a term paper-paraphrase or summarize-you must cite your source. This, of course, is not necessary on the TOEFL® iBT Test.

In **paraphrase**, we restate a text or passage, giving the meaning in another form. In a way, we attempt to adapt ourselves to the author by selecting words and phrases from our own vocabulary that can accommodate the meaning we perceive in his or her words and phrases. It includes matching our own words and phrases with what we think are the meanings in the author's words and phrases. It is an open-ended, trial-and-error process, subject to ongoing correction.

As an example, not of the actual trial-and-error matching process, but of the result of that process, consider the following paraphrase of the first paragraph in the *Declaration of Independence*:

➤ Original Paragraph:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

➤ Paraphrase

When some people think they must break away from others, and assume the independent and equal status that all people deserve, they ought to explain their reasons for doing so.

Note that a paraphrase conveys the same ideas, but may not at all convey the full effect or flavor of the original. The above paraphrase, for example, conveys nothing of the grand tone produced by "When in the course of human events" or "to assume among the powers of the earth" or "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Still, paraphrasing is worthwhile, for in finding different words that will accommodate the author's meaning, we have in a sense made his meaning our own and thus come to understand him.

II. Summary

The second technique is **summary**. A summary gives a shortened form of a work, retaining the general sense and unity of the original. As a process it too is most likely an open-ended, trial-and-error matching activity subject to ongoing correction. Both paraphrase and summary are probably reciprocal, i.e., paraphrase helps one to summarize, and summary helps one to paraphrase. One difference between summary and paraphrase is in their respective lengths; a paraphrase might well be as long as (or longer than) the original, whereas a summary is shorter. A summary of the passage paraphrased above might read:

➤ Summary

If they wish to be respected, people must not dissolve their ties with others without giving reasons.

Or, even shorter:

The relations of civilized people are not altered except for cause.

Another difference between paraphrase and summary is that generally, paraphrasing is for shorter texts whereas summarizing is for longer texts. Reducing a long text to half but without omitting its step-by-step development combines both paraphrase and summary. A mere summary, on the other hand, would omit the step-by-step progression and reduce the whole text to its thesis and major supporting points in relatively fewer words. The value of summarizing is that the process of sifting and sorting to discover controlling ideas produces another level of understanding.

Summary may take various forms. The summary presented above concerns the author's *explicit* meaning. Another variation might refer to the author's *implicit* meaning. To use the *Declaration* paragraph again:

➤ Summary

The Declaration begins by implying that the colonists are a civilized people who have achieved such stature as warrants separate nationhood.

Still other variations:

The Declaration begins by identifying three purposes of the "declaration": to dissolve a relationship, to assume independent status, and to justify these two preceding acts.

And:

The Declaration opens with the usual defense of revolution.

With this last example, we are leaving the area of an author's intended meaning and getting into a summary of one of the other meanings a text may have beyond its author's intended meaning—in the above case, the summary says we can understand the text as a typical example of a whole class of revolutionary documents.

An even clearer example of this kind of summary would be:

The Declaration takes the high moral stance typically adopted by the have-nots when they are about to take from the haves.

This summary interprets the *Declaration* writers as using moral statements to justify economic motives. At this point some might say that we have indeed left the realm of interpretation altogether and entered the domain of criticism. But to illustrate how criticism might still be different from the last two summaries, consider the next two statements, which are offered as examples of criticism (i.e., passing judgment about a thing's value or worth):

➤ **Criticism**

The Declaration is one of the most stirring manifestoes ever composed.

The Declaration changed the course of human affairs the world over, and for the better.

"Critical" statements, then, are those intended to pass judgment about the value or lack of value of something. In the last two statements, "most stirring" and "for the better" are more obviously intended as value judgments.

To sum up, interpretation is the art of understanding a text. Paraphrase and summary are two techniques that help us interpret. Paraphrase restates an author's meaning in different words. Summary gives a shortened version of the author's meaning, or one of the many other private or public meanings the text may have. Each technique sheds light on the other, and both increase our understanding. Beyond interpretation, criticism is a value judgment that often attempts to explain why what we have understood or interpreted is worth the effort.

III. Basic Study Techniques

Students who are able to regulate the study process often experience increased interest in learning, increased feelings of competency, and increased optimism about their ability to be successful. By experimenting with a variety of different study techniques, you can find methods that are suitable for you, and can ensure you get the most out of your time.

➤ RCRC

The first study strategy that we will discuss is RCRC. Many people find acronyms, a strategy where each letter represents a word, useful as they are easy to remember and quite straightforward. This study technique is useful for memorizing information, as it is repetitive, but it requires more participation than just reading information over and over.

Read
Cover
Recite
Check

Simply **Read** aloud the passage that you need to memorize, then **Cover** it with your hand. **Recite** the passage that you have just read without looking at the paper. Then, **Check** to see if you were correct. Repeat this process until you feel comfortable with the information. By continuing to use this technique, even for information you have already memorized, you will retain the information, and be able to quickly remember it when needed, like during an exam.

➤ Flash Cards

Flash cards remain one of the most effective, yet underrated study techniques. To make flash cards, follow these simple steps:

1. Buy or make cue cards.
2. Write a question/word that you need to memorize on the front of the card, and the answer or definition on the back.
3. Read the questions out loud, and if you were able to answer correctly, move on to the next card. Make a pile of the cards you answered incorrectly or guessed on, and review them as needed after you have gone through all of the cue cards.

➤ **Teach a friend**

One of the best ways to learn something is to teach it to another person. You must have a clear understanding of a subject before you can explain it in detail to someone else. Your student might also have questions that can show you a different angle or approach to learning the material. Once you are both comfortable with the subject, you can test each others knowledge.

➤ **Location and Time Management**

Location is not so much of a study technique, but is a large factor in your ability to retain knowledge and stay focused making studying both easier and faster.

Start by finding a location that is comfortable and does not contain anything that could be a potential distraction such as T.V., radio, pets, phones, friends, or anything that prevents you from concentrating on the task at hand. Make sure that your location is well lit and you have time set aside to study so you won't be interrupted. Try to plan your study periods ahead of time, but make sure they fit you're schedule. For example, if you are not a morning person, this would not be a good time to try and learn and retain information.

Time management is very important when it comes to studying. By studying for a short period of time several times a day, you can stay focused and learn material faster than you would by studying for a long period once a day. If you study for maybe 3 or more periods of 10 – 30 minutes a day, you will be more likely to remember information because you are constantly being reminded throughout the day. On this note, another good memorization technique is to quickly review the material you covered in the last study period or material from the previous day, before you begin with new material. And last but not least, stay positive! If you get stuck on a certain subject, move on and come back to it later. You will not remember any information if you were frustrated while you were studying. You will just remember being frustrated, and that is not useful to anyone!

➤ **PACER**

PACER, is not a studying technique, but a step-by-step guide to help guide you through a test so you can get the highest score possible.

● **Preview**

When you receive the test, **P**review the whole exam before you begin. Make sure that everything is there; all pages, questions, etc.

● **Arrange**

Next, you must **A**rrange the time you have been given. If your test is worth 50 marks, 15 for multiple choice and 35 for an essay and you have an hour to complete it, make sure that you spend the bulk of your time on the essay. By arranging your time so that you have 10-15 minutes on the multiple choice questions and 45-50 minutes on the essay, you will have more time for the essay, which means you won't have to rush through the most difficult part of the exam.

● **Clues**

An important thing to do in a test is to look for clues to answers for previous questions in the test. These will not be obvious, or even on purpose, but occasionally the test makers put the answer to a previous question in the text of another question.

● **Easy questions first**

Do the easy questions first! Too many people become stuck on a difficult question, and waste all of their time on it when they could have answered several other questions and received a higher score. If you answer the questions that you are sure about first, you can maximize your points by getting as many as you can before you run out of time. Another good reason for this is it boosts your confidence so you will be more likely to attempt questions you would have otherwise not been able to answer.

● **Review!**

No matter how good the test feels, **ALWAYS** review! Every point counts towards your score, and if you miss a question or found that you wrote an incorrect answer, it can be the difference between a pass and a fail. You should also never leave a question blank. Always take a guess. If it is a multiple choice question, you can usually determine one or two answers that are definitely incorrect and then you have a 25-50% chance of choosing the correct answer which is a much higher percentage than zero, which is what you will receive if you leave it blank.

Some more great software and workbooks to help you prepare for the TOEFL® iBT Test:

Free E-Book:



Preparing for the TOEFL® iBT Test:

Provides study tips and important information to help you get the highest possible score on the TOEFL® iBT Test.

TOEFL® iBT Test Software:



Grand Slam Study Pack for the TOEFL® iBT Test:

This package provides two computer-based practice tests, three workbooks for enhancing English listening, writing, and reading skills, our popular pronunciation software, and a bonus workbook with lots of great study and test-taking tips.



Note Taking Study Guide for the TOEFL® iBT Test:

Effective notes can be the difference between correctly answering a question or not. This study guide includes an overview of note taking methods and practice activities based on realistic TOEFL® iBT Test Listening, Writing, and Speaking section lectures that will help you excel in a real test.



Writing Lab for the TOEFL® iBT Test:

There are two parts to the Writing section of the TOEFL® iBT Test: the integrated writing task, and the independent writing task. You will require strong note-taking, listening, summarizing, editing, and essay writing skills. The more familiar you are with these activities, the higher your score will be!



Learning English Advanced Study Skills:

This workbook has both academic and conversational listening passages, giving you an ideal balance of practice to help you improve your overall listening ability. Included are practice questions with solutions that will help you to understand the main idea of what is said as well as specific details.

*Check back regularly for more free e-books to keep practicing.
Good luck on your exam!*