Put simply, **paraphrasing** is expressing someone else’s statement or idea in your own words. You might think that this is something to be avoided in academic writing. However, providing you clearly cite and reference the original source, paraphrasing can serve an important role when used appropriately.

**Why should you paraphrase?**

- Paraphrasing helps to facilitate greater flow in your writing by maintaining a consistency of voice.
- Accurately rewording someone else’s work demonstrates that you have understood the text.
- Paraphrasing can help you to identify any problems in your own understanding of the text.

**Things to avoid when paraphrasing**

- Do not simply change two or three words from the original source. Instead, you must look to change the wording, phrasing and structure of the original statement or passage as best you can, whilst maintaining the essence of the original source. Simply changing two or three words from the original passage can constitute plagiarism, even when an accurate citation is provided.
- When paraphrasing, you must always cite and reference the original source.
- Do not misrepresent work to serve your own purposes. Paraphrasing partly tests your ability to interpret and accurately rephrase the work of others. Distorting the original content to suit the needs of your argument would severely undermine the integrity of your work.
- Try to avoid paraphrasing when a direct quotation would serve you better. Whilst you should generally try to paraphrase in your work, there are occasions when paraphrasing can be problematic or unnecessary. For instance, the original statement might include a high density of specialised language that might be difficult to translate in a clear manner. Paraphrase where possible, but only when you can clearly and accurately communicate the meaning of the original content.
A few tips for paraphrasing effectively:

- Take the time to understand the original passage you are paraphrasing. In doing so, you can better articulate the content in your own words without misinterpreting or misrepresenting the original source.

- Try to avoid being too reliant on the original text. Instead, read the passage you want to paraphrase a few times to ensure you have a clear understanding of the text, then put it to one side and try to summarise the passage in a single statement with two or three supporting bullet points. Once you have done this, you can think more carefully about the wording and structure of your paraphrase without the temptation of copying the original.

- Make sure you identify all parts of the text that are relevant to what you want to say, as well as the parts that are not. Are the parts you intend to use already in a sensible order, or would it make things clearer to reorganise them?

Example

Original source:

So the Net eliminates a traditional dimension of civil legibility. In the standard sort of spatial city, where you are frequently tells who you are. (And who you are will often determine where you are allowed to be.) Geography is destiny; it constructs representations of crisp and often brutal clarity. You may come from the right side of the tracks or the wrong side, from Beverly Hills, Chinatown, East Los, or Watts, from the Loop, the North Side, or the South Side, from Beacon Hill, the North End, Cambridge, Somerville, or Roxbury – and everybody knows how to read this code. (If you are homeless, of course, you are nobody.) You may find yourself situated in gendered space or ungendered space, domains of the powerful or margins of the powerless; there are financial districts for the pinstripe set, pretentious yuppie watering holes, places where you need a jacket and tie, golf clubs where you won’t see any Jews or blacks, shopping malls, combat zones, student dives, teenage hangouts, gay bars, redneck bars, biker bars, skid rows, and death rows. But the Net’s despatialization of the interaction destroys the geocode’s key. There is no such thing as a better address, and you cannot attempt to define yourself by being seen in the right places in the right company.

Paraphrased version:

In *City of Bits*, William J. Mitchell (1995) argues that the internet disrupts the traditional relationship between physical place and socio-cultural identity. In advancing this argument, Mitchell describes the urban experience as a spatial code in which our physical occupation of space serves as a marker of social and cultural identity. For instance, space can be strongly associated with a particular gender, a certain social class and economic status, or a specific ethnic group. In this respect, Mitchell perceives urban space as a structure for maintaining social order by guiding people towards their ‘pre-destined’ place. However, Mitchell claims that the internet subverts this spatial code by despatialising human interaction. Indeed, rooted in a virtual world of communication, people are unable to define themselves because of the absence of shared physical space.

Things to observe:

- By rephrasing the original quote, the second passage maintains the consistency of the author’s voice.

- The structure of the content has been slightly changed, bringing the central argument to the start of the passage to make the argument clearer and more succinct.

- Whilst maintaining the essence of the original argument, the second passage has only rephrased the most relevant information, reducing the number of words in the process — useful when battling a restrictive word count.