

Using Course Materials to Practice Paraphrasing

Purpose: This activity is designed to accomplish two things at once: it encourages students to read carefully and therefore learn the material rather than just skim it (or skip it); and it allows you to easily check their paraphrasing skills since you are already intimately familiar with the text.

In-class time: 15 – 20 minutes

Out-of-class time: 30 minutes for assessment

Activity: Ask students to read a good chunk of text from your course materials—a chapter from a textbook, an essay, or an online lecture—and take notes on that text. Emphasize that they shouldn't copy the material; they should rephrase the main ideas in their own words. If you wish, you can also ask them to record works cited information for the text in the style you're using for the course. If the citation style you use requires page numbers or other information, you can ask for that as well. One or two pages of handwritten notes are usually enough for you to get a clear sense of whether they can paraphrase or not.

Assessment: I use a small highlighter to mark troublesome passages copied directly from the text, and I make a quick note in the margin (also in highlighter) that this section is too close to the original and therefore would be considered plagiarism (or for the squeamish, Not Good Paraphrasing.) If the student needs further clarification, you can show him or her the original passage, right there in your textbook or handout. Reading like a lightning-bug, you can zoom through an entire class's worth in thirty minutes or less.