

mean, for what a sentence means is never self-evident. A mantra of this book is that analytical writers quote *in order* to analyze. That is, they follow up quotation by voicing what specifically they understand that quote to mean. The best way to arrive at that meaning is to paraphrase. (Some disciplines, it must be acknowledged, refrain from quoting and include only the paraphrase.) In any case, a quote alone cannot serve as your “answer” by itself; you can’t use a quote in place of your own active explanation of what a reading is saying. Quotes only help you to focus and launch that explanation. (For more on this subject, see Chapter 8.)

PARAPHRASE × 3

Paraphrasing is one of the simplest and most overlooked ways of discovering ideas and stimulating interpretation. Like POINTING, PARAPHRASE × 3 seeks to locate you in the local, the particular, and the concrete rather than the global, the overly general, and the abstract. Rather than make a broad claim about what a sentence or passage says, a paraphrase stays much closer to the actual words.

The word “paraphrase” means to put one phrase next to (“para”) another phrase. When you recast a sentence or two—finding the best synonyms you can think of for the original language, translating it into a parallel statement—you are thinking about what the original words mean. The use of “× 3” (times 3) in our label is a reminder to paraphrase key words more than once, not settling too soon for a best synonym (see Figure 2.2).

- 1 **Select a short passage** (as little as a single sentence or even a phrase) from whatever you are studying that you think is interesting, perhaps puzzling, and especially useful for understanding the material. Assume you *don't* understand it completely, even if you think you do.
- 2 **Find synonyms for all of the key terms.** Don't just go for the gist, a loose approximation of what was said. Substitute language virtually word-for-word to produce a parallel version of the original statement.
- 3 **Repeat this rephrasing several times** (we suggest three). This will produce a range of possible implications that the original passage may possess.
- 4 **Contemplate the various versions you have produced.** Which seem most plausible as restatements of what the original piece intends to communicate?
- 5 **Decide what you now recognize about the meaning of the original passage.** What do you now recognize about the passage on the basis of your repeated restatements? What now does the passage appear to mean? What implications have the paraphrasings revealed?

FIGURE 2.2

PARAPHRASE × 3

When you paraphrase language, whether your own or language you encounter in your reading, you are not just defining terms but opening out the wide range of implications those words inevitably possess. When we read, it is easy to skip quickly over the words, assuming we know what they

mean. Yet when people start talking about what particular words mean—the difference, for example, between *assertive* and *aggressive* or the meaning of ordinary words such as *polite* or *realistic* or *gentlemanly*—they usually find less agreement than expected.

Note: Different academic disciplines treat paraphrase somewhat differently. In the humanities, it is essential first to quote an important passage and then to paraphrase it. In the social sciences, however, especially in Psychology, you paraphrase but rarely if ever quote. In more advanced writing in the social sciences, paraphrase serves the purpose of producing the literature review—survey of relevant research—that forms the introduction to reports.

How PARAPHRASE × 3 Unlocks Implications: An Example Like the “So what?” question, paraphrasing is an effective way of bringing out implications—meanings that are there in the original but not overt. And especially if you paraphrase the same passage repeatedly, you will discover which of the words are most “slippery”—elusive, hard to define simply and unambiguously.

Let’s look at a brief example of PARAPHRASE × 3 from the book *The Literature Workshop* by Sheridan Blau. We have paraphrased it three times.

“A conviction of certainty is one of the most certain signs of ignorance and may be the best operational definition of stupidity.”

1. Absence of doubt is a clear indication of cluelessness and is perhaps the top way of understanding the lack of intelligence.
2. A feeling of being right is one of the most reliable indexes of lack of knowledge and may show in action the meaning of mental incapacity.
3. Being confident that you are correct is a foolproof warning that you don’t know what’s going on, and this kind of confidence may be an embodiment of foolishness.

Having arrived at these three paraphrases, we can use them to explore what they suggest—i.e., their implications. Here is a short list. Once you start paraphrasing, you discover that there’s a lot going on in this sentence.

- One implication of the sentence is that as people come to know more and more, they feel less confident about what they know.
- Another is that ignorance and stupidity are probably not the same thing, though they are often equated.
- Another is that there’s a difference between feeling certain about something and being aware of this certainty as a conviction.
- Another implication is that stupidity is hard to define—perhaps it can only be defined in practice, “operationally,” and not as an abstract concept.

As we paraphrased, we were struck by the repetition of “certainty” in “certain,” which led us to wonder about the tone of the sentence. Tone may