

# INSTITUTE WRITING PROGRAM

## THE WRITING CENTER

### Paraphrase and Attribution

#### Paraphrase

According to *Everyday Writer*, “A paraphrase accurately states all the relevant information from a passage in your own words and sentence structures, without any additional comments or elaboration” (207).

To write a paraphrase that does not reproduce the author’s words or sentence structures, you should take careful notes as you read, being sure not to write down any direct quotations from the text without also marking them as direct quotations. Then, you should write your paraphrase from your notes alone, without looking back at the original source. This will help reduce the temptation to use the author’s phrases or structures, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

#### Original source:

We think of underdog victories as improbable events: that’s why the story of David and Goliath has resonated so strongly all these years. But Arreguín-Toft’s point is that they aren’t at all. Underdogs win all the time. Why, then, are we so shocked every time a David beats a Goliath? Why do we automatically assume that someone who is smaller or poorer or less skilled is necessarily at a disadvantage?

-Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath*, 22

#### Improper paraphrase:

Malcolm Gladwell argues that even though we often assume that underdog victories are improbable events, that assumption makes little sense. Underdogs win quite frequently. Gladwell says we shouldn’t be shocked when David beats Goliath, and that we shouldn’t automatically assume that people with fewer skills or less strength will always be at a disadvantage.

The paraphrase above uses many of the same phrases that appear in the original source. It also reproduces some of Gladwell’s sentence structures, particularly the sentence “Underdogs win all the time,” which is reproduced as “Underdogs win quite frequently.” Swapping out one or two words for synonyms is still plagiarism.

#### Proper paraphrase:

Malcolm Gladwell argues that people tend to assume that the underdog rarely beats a favored opponent; according to Gladwell, “that’s why the story of David and Goliath has resonated so strongly all these years” (22). But, Gladwell insists, there is actually a fairly high chance that an underdog will win in a given conflict. Given this, Gladwell wonders why an underdog victory always seems unexpected, and why most people expect that a weaker opponent “is necessarily at a disadvantage” (22).



## Attribution

Attribution is the practice of indicating whose words or ideas you are quoting or paraphrasing. Failure to properly attribute a paraphrase, even if the wording is entirely your own, means that you are stealing someone else's ideas.

### Original text:

Through these stories, I want to explore two ideas. The first is that much of what we consider valuable in our world arises out of these kinds of lopsided conflicts, because the act of facing overwhelming odds produces greatness and beauty. And second, that we consistently get these kinds of conflicts wrong. We misread them. We misinterpret them. Giants are not what we think they are. The same qualities that appear to give them strength are often the sources of great weakness. And the fact of being an underdog can change people in ways that we often fail to appreciate: it can open doors and create opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seemed unthinkable.

-Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath*, 6

### Improper attribution (steals an idea):

Conflicts between underdogs and stronger opponents have been an important part of human history, and are the source of many major advances. But even though they are so important, we often mistakenly ascribe too much power to the seemingly strong opponents, when they often have major weakness. We also do not appreciate how valuable it can be to experience being an underdog.

The paraphrase above does not tell the reader that the ideas being discussed originated with Malcolm Gladwell. This paraphrase does not steal Gladwell's words, but it does steal his ideas.

### Proper attribution:

In his book *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits and the Art of Battling Giants*, Malcolm Gladwell takes the position that conflicts between underdogs and stronger opponents have been an important part of human history, and are the source of many major advances. But even though they are so important, Gladwell argues that we often mistakenly ascribe too much power to the seemingly strong opponents, when they are often have major weakness. Further, according to Gladwell we also do not appreciate how valuable it can be to experience being an underdog (6).

Insufficient attribution can also make it difficult for your reader to tell which parts of your paper are your own argument, and which are the arguments of others. In some cases, this might lead readers to believe that you agree with positions that you do not actually take. Using words and phrases like "Smith argues," "According to Jones," or "Johnson claims," will let your reader know that you are summarizing or paraphrasing someone else's argument, not making your own claims.