Transcript 2: Paraphrasing tips

Watch this short video and learn strategies for effective paraphrasing in academic writing. What makes a good paraphrase, how do you do it, and what role can reporting verbs play?

Title Slide: Paraphrasing tips
Paraphrasing demonstrates that you have understood what you have read. To paraphrase well, you need to use your own words and you need to make sure you don’t change the meaning of the original text.

Slide Two: Paraphrasing
Here is a direct quote taken from an article. It is about the introduction of video gaming into school curriculum to combat childhood obesity. Compare this direct quote, with the two example paraphrases below. Which do you think reads better and why? Press pause to give you time to read. Press play when you are ready to continue.

Paraphrase 1 is better because the writer has expressed the idea by Quinn in his/her own words – the meaning is clear and unchanged. Paraphrase 2 however does not read well. It seems that the writer has looked for synonyms of certain words in isolation, rather than in context. ‘Might be positively valid’ has directly replaced the words ‘may’ ‘prove’ and ‘positive’. As a result, some of the original meaning has been lost. Rather than looking at the words in the sentence, the student should have looked at the sentence as a whole to identify the idea and meaning of what is being said.

Slide Three: Paraphrasing
To help you paraphrase at the ‘ideas’ level, it’s good to take notes as you read, and to do so in your own words. Don’t simply replace original words as this is not enough to convey the same meaning. Think about what the author is trying to say, and imagine you are rephrasing to clarify the meaning for your reader. Restructure the sentence, change the word order and use different word forms. After you have paraphrased the idea, check what you have written against the original text to make sure you have not changed the meaning.

Remember, the key is to paraphrase at the ideas level. Do not imitate words. Rather, focus on what the sentence is actually about.
Slide Four: Reporting
Now let’s look at the role of reporting verbs. We use reporting verbs when we refer to what the author has ‘said’ – this is called author-prominent in-text referencing. The paraphrase is exactly the same in all 3 sentences below, but a different reporting verb has been used each time. The reporting verbs are ‘argues’ in sentence 1, ‘claims’ in sentence 2, and ‘suggests’ in sentence 3. What do you think the reporting verbs demonstrate? The reporting verbs illustrate to the reader your, the writer’s, interpretation of what you have read. In the first example, the writer thinks that Quinn has made a strong argument, Quinn has argued something. In the second example, the writer is a bit more sceptical (perhaps the idea presented by Quinn is insufficiently backed up by research or evidence). The third example is more neutral – the writer is being cautious, showing neither positive or negative evaluation of the ideas presented by Quinn. So reporting verbs can be used to express your interpretations opinions or judgements. They show what you think about what you have read.

There are many reporting verbs out there. For more examples, visit the L3 EASS website.