Paraphrasing:

An Introductory Unit

In Paraphrasing in Academic Discourse

Please note that the appendices submitted to the Essay Bank do not contain the entire set if unit materials. This constitutes 54 pages, and is in an official format that does not lend itself to easy attachment to documents in other formats.
The appendices contain references and the overview to the unit in a simplified format.

Outline

1. Introduction

As Kroll (1990, in Kroll 1990: 140) has noted, successful academic writing for ESL students is a 'Herculean' task. Students must demonstrate mastery of appropriate rhetorical form, and mastery over the whole range of language: from word choice and structure, to sentences, to paragraphs, to overall organization. Further, writing from background sources is a vital element in much academic writing. Kroll (2003, in Kroll 2003: 191) later wrote "[i]t is hard to imagine a setting in which academic writing could be seen as divorced from source texts..." Spack (1998, in Silva 2001: 95) also wrote that the writing students must do in disciplinary courses is rarely dependent on their own knowledge base. Grabe (2002, in Kroll: 2003: 257) also highlighted the importance of teaching students to use background sources appropriately in their own writing.

The appropriate use of background sources is particularly challenging, requiring a complex set of skills. As Grabe (2003: in Kroll, 2003: 244) has noted, students need to decide what information should come from the original text, how that information will fit into the student's writing, how closely the original information should be transferred to maintain the original author's meaning, and what formal rhetorical devices should be used. Campbell (1987, in Kroll, 1990: 211) has also written about the complexity of integrating information from sources into one's own writing. This difficulty has been evident in my teaching situation. Despite a focus on the appropriate use of other's work through summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting, our students continued to demonstrate very weak skills overall in integrating the work of others into their writing. For this paper, I have written and trialled a unit on paraphrasing in hopes of helping our students improve this aspect of their writing.

This paper first considers the contexts of my teaching situation, and then presents the paraphrasing unit in detail, beginning with the goals of the unit, followed by a section on approach and methodology adopted, design, discussion of each part of the unit, and presentation and discussion of the outcomes, both quantifiable and subjective.

2. Context

McDonough and Shaw (1993: 6-7) have written that materials and methods should not be considered separately from teaching contexts, as design and selection arise from them. For this section, I have adopted the contextual factors set out by McDonough and Shaw to the extent that they were measurable and addressable within the scope of this project. This provides a framework for relating the unit to the context for which it was designed.

2.1 Learners

Learner factors that influenced design of the unit include proficiency range, academic and educational levels, reasons for learning, and, to a limited extent, learning styles.

I considered that the scope of this project did not allow for significant consideration of learner's ages, mother tongues, aptitudes, attitudes, or personalities. Though these factors influence classroom interaction, I did not consider them when designing the unit itself.

This unit was written to fit into our COMM149 reading/writing course. The students had tested within a range of Canadian benchmark 7 to 8 on reading and writing skills. When students attain a level of 8 in all four skills, they are considered ready to enter English stream university courses. They are adults, ranging in age from early 20s to 60s. Most are immigrants, though a few are refugees or international students. This class included 17 students, speaking 8 different mother tongues. Their educational levels range from very little (formal education) to students with post-graduate degrees from their home countries. The majority has the equivalent of 12 – 16 years of formal education. The students were generally highly motivated, perhaps in part because this is the last English language course many of them will need and they are eager to move on in pursuing their professional and academic goals.

2.2 Setting

Again, I have considered some of McDonough and Shaw's (1993: 6-7) factors in the design of this unit, including the role of English in the school, teachers and management, resources, socio-cultural environment, and tests used.

The role of English in the country, support personnel, number of pupils, the physical environment, and procedures for monitoring the overall program are not factors in the design of this unit.

Though our students are mostly 'new Canadians' and certainly need global English skills, our program is focused on helping non-native speakers enter English stream university study and professions. Most teachers have extensive experience and we are encouraged to take responsibility for designing courses; it has recently been recognized that basing our courses on textbooks has not been widely successful in meeting the needs of our students and we are collaborating to develop a task-based approach throughout the program. We have computer resources available; the COMM149 course meets in the lab for two hours weekly. The primary assessment instrument for this course is a research paper. This paper may be on a topic chosen by the student, to reflect his or her professional and academic goals, and should incorporate materials from a minimum of five background sources.

3. The Unit

3.1 Goals

Coulthard (1998: 2) wrote that an evaluation of unsuccessful texts can help us to understand successful texts. An evaluation of the paraphrasing produced by prior students in our course indicated weaknesses in citation and a strong tendency to reproduce the original sentence structure. Students often created paraphrases simply by inserting synonyms into the original sentence structure. Previous courses had attempted to emphasize the importance of 'using your own words' when paraphrasing, but this was not sufficient in most cases. In Campbell's (1987, in Kroll, 1990: 221) study into the use of background information in writing, she suggests that students may adhere too closely to the original work in the interests of maintaining an academic style, not having confidence that their own choices will be appropriate to the task. I hope to help our students begin to overcome this problem in their writing.

As Kroll (1990: 141) has noted, "[t]here is no single written standard that can be said to represent the 'ideal' written product in English." Recognizing that there is no 'perfect paraphrase,' I tried to determine reasonable goals for paraphrasing for our students. Following are the criteria that were used for evaluation of student work in this unit.

1. Some form of citation should appear at both beginning and end of the paraphrase, and be generally accurate in terms of format. (While this is not standard procedure in most formal academic formatting systems, it is considered useful in our department as it enables us to identify clearly what has part of the text is a paraphrase, so that we can more easily check the paraphrase against the original.)
2. Sentence structures used in the paraphrases should be generally different from the original.
3. Few of the same words and phrases, other than technical terminology, should be used.
4. The expression of ideas in the paraphrase should generally express the ideas that appear in the original.
5. All important ideas from the original should appear in the paraphrase.

Though Hudson (1989, in Nunan, 1992: 85) describes the 'essential question' of program evaluation as questioning whether students have achieved 'mastery' of a target outcome, I view the unit as an introduction to paraphrasing in written academic discourse; 'mastery' is not the goal. Campbell (1987, in Kroll 1990: 222) referred to Briton's (1975) theory that the skill of integrating other's work into writing is developmental: those students who continue to write in academic and professional genres will gain proficiency over time. I simply hope that the unit will give students a basic grasp of the concepts and conventions of paraphrasing.

3.2 Approach and Method

To fit into our developing program, I approached design of the unit from a task-based perspective. Feez (in Richards and Rogers 2001: 224) defined a task-based approach as emphasizing processes, using tasks that emphasize meaning, and encouraging interactive communication and negotiation. Both Nunan (1999: 24) and Richards and Rogers (2001: 229)

point out that tasks should be designed to 'stand alone;' there should be a sense of closure for each task. Further, as Swain (in Richards and Rogers: 2001: 228) has found, productive output should be a focus of a successful task-based program.

I also wanted to focus on consciousness-raising. Again taking Richards and Rogers' (2001: 236) definitions, I hope to focus the attention of our students on the conventions and techniques for creating paraphrases through "..attention-focusing pre-task activities, text exploration, guided exposure to parallel tasks, and use of highlighted material."

3.3 Design

In designing the unit, use of authentic materials and tasks was a priority. It is intuitively logical to assume that working with texts that exemplify writings students will be required to produce, will stimulate motivation. Nunan (1999: 26) wrote of the advantages of texts presenting target language in natural contexts. As Grabe (in Kroll: 2003: 246) notes "[s]tudies have shown that the use of relevant models of task assignments leads to better writing." Other target structures that naturally appear in academic writing are present in the unit; for example, although referencing and formatting are not overt focuses of this unit, both are reflected throughout the unit in the interests of modeling the standards we expect in the final paper.

I emphasized the integration of reading and writing in the unit. Campbell (in Kroll: 1990: 226-227) noted that there is support in the EAP literature for combining reading and writing tasks. She pointed out that analyzing academic texts, noticing how authors use citation and referencing in their work, and writing from sources benefit learners. This integration further supports development of critical reading skills, which are an objective of the course overall.

The unit employs a variety of group and individual tasks. Group tasks are included in the interests of encouraging meaningful interaction. I also hoped to facilitate strategic planning skills: there is a lot of material to cover in 3 2-hour classes, and strategies for finishing in time were needed. To support meaningful communication, I included activities for students to give and receive feedback on their 'output.' In addition to providing communicative time for our students, I also hoped to highlight building positive attitudes towards working with people from

different cultures and backgrounds. Allwright (1982) has written that this is a 'well-accepted' aim of language instruction, and is certainly applicable to our learners, most of whom will be living and working in Canadian societies where there is a high degree of multiculturalism.

Individual tasks are included, both to accommodate individual study preferences, and to reflect the rather isolated nature of the writing process. Further, within the group tasks, each student was given the materials, and no insistence was made that all students must actively participate in the teamwork. They were also encouraged to review the materials at home.

I expect the example texts in the unit to be replaced over time as more student-generated materials are collected. The unit itself is designed as a framework for addressing the skill of paraphrasing. As McDonough and Shaw (1993: 70) note, adaptability of materials is an important factor in overall evaluation of materials.

In a study focusing on ways in which reading proficiency impacts writing skills, Kennedy (in Campbell, 1987, in Kroll, 1990: 213) found that proficient readers read actively, interacting with texts in terms of underlining, note taking, and revision of notes prior to writing, and that this reflects positively in their writing processes. She found that less proficient readers interact with reading texts much less, and that they later had difficulty integrating their notes into their writing. One justification for moving our course away from being book-based is that we want our students to practice interacting more, and more critically, with written text. Many of our students demonstrate little background in critical reading skills, and a tendency to see written texts as monolithic, unchangeable, and 'above' their criticism. The handouts in this unit encourage students to write directly on the text, to underline and circle highlighted discourse features and problems in the texts. I hope this helps students interact more actively with texts.

The tasks are also designed to avoid the use of templates. In the past, we have used books that provided templates for students to fill in citations and 'their own words' on pre-formatted worksheets. However, among others, Johns (in Kroll: 2003: 210) warns against descriptions of text as templates rather than evolving, situated discourse. I wanted to try a more open-ended approach to the construction of paraphrases throughout the unit.

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The tasks are sequenced in agreement with Nunan's (1999: 30) principles: each task is intended to provide a basis for the next one, to proceed from reception to production, and from reproductive tasks to creative ones.

4. **Parts of the Unit**

The following sections describe each task within the unit. The instructions for each task appear in italicized type. The entire unit appears in the appendices of this paper.

4.1 Task 1

You will see four pieces of writing that include some examples of quotation and paraphrasing. You do not need to read carefully, or to understand the content of this work. Use your skimming and scanning reading skills to find each quote and paraphrase. Highlight or underline them. How many of each do you find?

This task uses authentic excerpts from research papers. One is an excerpt from a paper of my, and others are from papers submitted by students on previous courses. All were edited to create useful models for the task: I eliminated a few obvious errors on the student papers and changed the referencing style in my own. I did not attempt to produce 'perfect' examples, however, as I felt this would impair 'authenticity.'

This consciousness-raising task is designed to help students 'notice' (see Campbell, in Kroll: 1990: 226) how often quotations and paraphrases are used, and ways in which a reader can recognize that these elements have been taken from background sources. Students will also begin to interact with the texts, through highlighting and underlining. This is a receptive task, intended to provide a foundation for following tasks.

4.2 Task 2

You will see original quotes and paraphrases of the quotes. Compare the paraphrases to the quotes. What differences do you notice in the paraphrases? The first one is done for you as an example.

The materials used in this task are largely drawn from websites used in previous student papers. Students have typically used at least four websites as source materials for their papers, preferring them to printed materials, so I felt these would be relevant examples.

This task is again based on consciousness-raising, receptive, and designed to explicitly highlight the targets of the unit: appropriate citation, sentence structure, wording, transfer of ideas from original to paraphrase. It also emphasizes an important difference between paraphrasing and summarizing. The students have practiced summarization in previous courses, and I wanted them to notice that a paraphrase is usually longer than the original, in contrast to summaries.

4.3 Task 3

Changing sentence structures from active to passive is one especially useful tool when paraphrasing. On pages 1 and 2 from task two, find at least three examples of passive structures used in paraphrases.

This third receptive task is intended to highlight a useful tool in changing sentence structure. It is also intended to help satisfy the expectations many of our students have that grammatical structure study is the basis of language learning, by giving some grammatical focus, however brief, to the unit.

4.4 Task 4

With your team, write a set of 'rules' for paraphrasing, as you understand the process at this time. Your team should report the rules you find to the class.
Also, make a list of the words and phrases you have found that introduce paraphrases. Use the words and phrases from both tasks 1 and 2.

This productive, collaborative task is intended to help students consolidate the aspects of paraphrasing they have noticed so far. It focuses explicitly on the goals for paraphrasing highlighted in the unit. I expect this final task of day one to provide closure for the first four tasks.

4.5 Task 5

Now, try some paraphrasing yourself. Begin by listening. You may listen a couple of times, if you wish, to be sure you understand the main ideas. Then, type your paraphrase. Keep the rules your class determined in mind as you write.

Remember that you are reporting what you hear. Use your own words and sentence structure. You should not try to reproduce the sentences that you hear!! The original author will be noted on your screen so that you can include citation in your paraphrases. Number one gives you an example.

This task experiments with listening, using our computer resources. The listening materials were drawn from the archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Because the broadcasts are intended for general audiences, I felt that the language level and usage should be within an appropriate range for our students. I chose topics of general interest, reflecting our socio-cultural environment, or topics that previous students have chosen for their research papers. I chose key words from each clip, which appear on the student's computer screens as they are listening to the clip. These were content words that I felt might be unfamiliar to the students, and proper names. Citation information also appears on the computer screen, so that students can include citation in their paraphrases.

All transcripts, including key words, appear in the appendices of this paper.

As noted earlier, our students have shown a strong inclination to maintain the original sentence structure when they are attempting to write paraphrases. I postulated that if they could not see the original sentence structures, the exercise might help to encourage them to trust their own choices to be appropriate to the task (see Campbell, 1987, in Kroll, 1990: 221).

Both tasks 5 and 6 are individual tasks, for listening, reading, and note taking. I feel this is the most useful way to use our computer lab time, as it is difficult to work in pairs or teams when each student is seated behind a computer monitor. The tasks are productive, but can be

considered reproductive as versus creative, as they are somewhat guided by the use of keywords on the screen.

4.6 Task 6

Now, go to the Purdue University Owl website. You will find it at
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r_paraphr.html
The printer in the lab will be turned off. Please read and take notes from the section: Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words. Then, if you have time, you can try some of the practice exercises on the website.

This individual, productive task has two focuses: helping students to consolidate their knowledge of paraphrasing, and to make them aware that there are web resources for writing. The product of the task is a display of note-taking skills, not a focus of this paper, and the student notes have not been analyzed. I hope that the task also provided a strong closure to day two of the unit.

4.7 Task 7

Work with your team to analyze the example paraphrases. Check them for:
  1. *too similar sentence structures*
  2. *too many of the same words/phrases*
  3. *ideas changed from the original*
  4. *wrong/insufficient citation*
  5. *no/incorrect introductory words/phrases*
Work together to rewrite the paraphrases, making them better.

This group task is intended to highlight common problems, reflecting the evaluation criteria for the unit, and to encourage critical interaction with the texts. The outcomes of this task are not analyzed in this paper, because the task was begun in teams, and then the whole class collaborated at the end to see whether all agreed, and teacher feedback was given to highlight the

very few items missed by the whole group. Hence, there were no discrepancies in the outcomes to measure.

4.8 Task 8

In this task, you will find fourteen clips from original pieces of writing. Choose six that interest you. Work to produce the best possible paraphrases. You can check with your team members about how best to write your paraphrases. It is ok to work together!
You should turn in your 6 paraphrases to the teacher. Remember to ask questions if you are not sure about any part of a paraphrase!

This task is designed to help students collaborate to produce paraphrases, using the knowledge and experience they have now gained. The task is designed to move students some distance from reproduction to creation, and to reflect the individual nature of the writing process, while still providing opportunities for collaboration, and feedback from peers and teachers.

4.9 Task 9

Now, in your team, revisit the rules for paraphrasing. Do you need to add or change anything? Do you each feel confident that you understand how to write paraphrases for your research papers? If you still have any questions, this is the time to find out!!

Like task 4, this productive, collaborative task is intended to provide students with the guidelines the class has discovered and practiced for writing paraphrases. The outcomes of this task are not analyzed, as there were no discrepancies to measure. I hope that this task provides a strong sense of closure for the classroom hours of the unit.

4.10 Task 10
Choose three excerpts from the references you plan to use for your research paper. Type the original three pieces as quotes and then write your own paraphrases, including citation.   You will be able to use these paraphrases as part of your research paper.

This final, creative task was assigned as homework, and students were given three days to complete it. The task is intended to move the students into individual work again, reflecting the demands of academic writing. Students will integrate their knowledge into paraphrases that they will be able to use in the research paper required for this course, lending the task a high level of authenticity and relevance.

5.**Outcomes**

In this section, qualitative outcomes are presented for Tasks 1-4, Task 5, and the three open-ended questions on the survey. Quantitative outcomes are presented for tasks 5, 8, and 10. No outcomes are presented for Tasks 6, 7, or 9, for the reasons mentioned in the sections above. All outcomes, including field notes, survey results, and transcripted, coded paraphrases produced appear in the appendices of the paper.

5.1 Qualitative Outcomes

The field notes and surveys highlighted in this section appear in entirety in the appendices of the paper. Two teachers were present during the entire three days (six hours) of the unit; myself and a colleague with whom I frequently work. There was also a computer lab specialist present for task 5. The field notes incorporate feedback from all the teachers present. This fits the definition of action research put forward by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, in Nunan, 1992: 17) of collaborative research conducted by classroom teachers, intended to produce change in a program.

5.1.1   Tasks 1 – 4

Tasks 1 through 4 were measured only through qualitative methods. As the tasks were team and whole-group-based, and focused on introducing paraphrasing in a general manner, I did not consider it feasible to analyze individual student outcomes. Field notes, however, did yield some useful qualitative information on these four tasks.

The unit began on the third day of the course. Team working dynamics had not been established, and students began the first task individually. However, after a short time for reading, the teams progressed to discussion spontaneously. This collaboration continued through the two-hour block allotted for tasks 1-4. As development of collaborative working skills was an element in the design of the unit, I considered this a positive outcome.

Time management was an issue throughout the course. Students expressed that they would have liked more time with all the exercises, and were instructed instead to review the tasks as homework.

The students worked in teams on task 4, to produce 'rules' for paraphrasing. The 'rules' they expressed were:

      Paraphrases are introduced at the beginning and cited at the end.

      Nouns and specific terms are sometimes copied from the original.

      Sentence structures should be changed from the original.

I believe that the second 'rule' above could read conversely: that most words are changed from the originals, indicating that the students basically expressed the guidelines I'd hoped to elicit through the consciousness-raising tasks.

5.1.2   Task 5

This class period opened with an introduction to the software for the task. Approximately 30% of the students in the class were new to our computer lab, and found navigating the software initially challenging. They began listening to the examples 15 minutes into the class. Students generally seemed to find the listenings more difficult than I'd hoped, though all three teachers agreed that they were at an appropriate level. The paraphrases produced are analyzed in more detail in the next section of this paper, and their content indicates that most students ultimately understood the listening clips, so the level is likely within an acceptable range. Student involvement appeared high throughout the task, and the quantifiable results are positive, so I believe the task was generally useful, though much more extensive study would be required to determine whether the task actually helped students to use different sentence structures when writing paraphrases later on in the course.

5.1.3 Survey Results

The survey at the end of this unit included three open questions (see McDonough & McDonough: 1997: 176 – 177). The responses to these questions have been graded into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative. Seventeen students responded to the survey, but not all answered every question.

The first open ended question was:

Overall, how confident do you feel that you will be able to write good paraphrases for your research paper, now that you have completed this unit?

Of 16 total responses, 10 (63%) indicate overall confidence, and are considered positive. Responses including the words 'but' or 'although' number 6 (37%), and are considered neutral. There were no responses considered negative.

I interpret this as a generally positive outcome. However, a more extensive study comparing paraphrases produced by students who have completed this unit with paraphrases produced by students who have had other kinds of instruction would be useful.

The second open ended question was:

Did you find working on some of the tasks in teams was useful, or would you prefer a different approach?

Of 17 total responses, 12 (76%) indicate a positive experience working on teams. 4 responses (24%) including the words 'sometimes' and 'but' are considered neutral. There were no entirely negative responses.

As stated, working in teams is an important feature of task-based learning, and I hoped that the group work experience in this unit would also support development of positive attitudes towards working with people from other cultures (see Allwright: 1982). The feelings of the students in this case can be said to be positive overall, and I hope that the inclusion of some opportunities to work individually helped to create a useful balance of task types inside the unit.

The third open ended question was:

Please note your comments about this unit.

Of 14 total responses, 11 (79%) are considered generally positive. These responses include words such as 'good,' 'makes sense,' 'very useful,' 'helped me improve,' 'have figured out,' and, simply 'thanks.' One response counted as positive also includes a caveat: the student noted that the course was a 'little bit difficult,' but that overall he or she will improve. Three students (21%) indicated neutral/negative responses. They include: "More examples are needed…" "I think it is just ok," and "I think the examples are too many."

I interpret these responses as generally positive. The opposing comments regarding quantity of examples might indicate that there are actually a fair number, but more study would be needed to determine this.

5.2   Quantitative Outcomes

Quantitative outcomes were calculated for tasks 5, 8, and 10. All transcriptions, analyses, and calculations appear in the appendices of this paper.

5.2.1   Task 5: Quantifiable information from the entire set of paraphrases produced

The entire set of paraphrases generated in this exercise has been evaluated only for the presence of citation, because the listening exercise required extensive comprehension skills on the part of the students, and it seemed unfair to evaluate all five elements at this early stage, in a task when students could not see the original materials. Further, some students were quite challenged by the use of computers.

There were 19 students present in the class, and a total of 70 paraphrases were produced.

91% (64 of 70): Include some attempt to introduce the paraphrase

76% (53 of 70): Include some attempt to include citation at the end of the paraphrase

09% (6 of 70): Include no attempt at citation

I feel that the numbers above indicate a good level of success in the consciousness-raising tasks, in terms of introducing the importance of citation and some of the conventions used in citation.

Task 5: Additional quantifiable information from a random sampling of paraphrases

For further analysis, I chose a smaller set of paraphrases at random. This set was analyzed for the presence of citation at beginning and end, and also for sentence structures that are essentially changed from the original, as this was an intended focus of the exercise.

Total Paraphrases Analyzed:	35	
Total Including Introducing Language for Citation:	33	94%
Total Including Some Form of Citation at the End:	31	89%
Total With Differing Sentence Structure:	29	83%

I consider the results of task five to be quite positive, as it appears that most students have grasped these three basic concepts in paraphrasing, though it is outside the scope of the project to analyze whether this task influenced the paraphrasing skills of the students all the way through the course, to their research papers.

5.2.2 Task 8: Quantifiable analysis of student paraphrases

For measurement of this task, I considered all paraphrases that I received within the three-day deadline. Late submissions were accepted, but I myself was no longer on hand, as I was sent on an overseas project. Transcriptions, complete with coding, appear in the appendices of the paper.

Elements considered:

1. Citation should appear at both beginning and end of the paraphrase, and be generally accurate in terms of format.
2. Sentence structures used in the paraphrases should be generally different from the original.
3. Few of the same words and phrases, other than technical terminology, should be used.
4. The expression of ideas in the paraphrase should generally express the ideas that appear in the original.
5. All important ideas from the original should appear in the paraphrase.

The elements are number-coded on the transcripts. If the paraphrase is considered successful in terms of the element, the number appears. Element 1, citation, was counted as complete if the student had any citation entry, whether at beginning, end, or both. Scores are /15 if the student

submitted three paraphrases, and /10 if the student submitted only two. I have calculated two scales: on the right, 'global' success, and below, success rates for the individual elements of the paraphrases.

Student	1	2	3	4	5		% "Success"
Natalia	3	3	3	1		10/15	67%
Laila	2	1	2		1	6/10	60%
Tony	3	3	3	2	2	13/15	87%
Chun Hong	3	3	3	2	1	12/15	80%
Ali	3	2	2	3	0	10/15	67%
Ajit	3	3	3	3	2	14/15	93%
Mark Yu	3	3	3	1	1	11/15	73%
Jenny	3	3	3	2	3	14/15	93%
Wei Li	1	2	2	2	0	7/10	70%
	96%	92%	96%	64%	40%		77%

The numbers above appear to indicate that students are generally successful in using the conventions of paraphrasing, including citation, use of different sentence structures, and different wording. Their skill levels drop when they work to express the ideas from the original.

5.2.3 Task 10: Quantifiable analysis of student paraphrases

Task 10 was analyzed using the same methods as in Task 8 above.

Student	1	2	3	4	5		% "Success"
Sam Wang	3	2	1	3	2	11/15	73%
Ivan	3	2	2	3	3	13/15	87%
Lindy	2	2	3	2	1	10/15	75%
Alice		3	3	3	2	11/15	73%
Nasim	3	2	3	2	3	13/15	87%
Kevin	1	1	1			3/5	60%
	75%	75%	81%	81%	69%		76%

The results of this task are possibly too limited to indicate outcomes with any degree of certainty. I was able to secure results of this task only from the first six students to consolidate their research paper projects to the point that they could produce some useful paraphrases before my own leaving date. The time limit imposed on the project by my other obligations was a considerable drawback.

Due to the limited scope of this study, the quantitative information generated by this analysis can be considered only in a subjective way. Further study would be needed to quantify the rate of improvement, but an average of 76-77% of 'successful' paraphrases almost certainly exceeds past student performance. This subjective evaluation is based on several conversations with other teachers in our course, and scanning of past student papers.

5.2.4 Student Survey: Quantifiable outcomes

A Likert scale was used to elicit student feedback on the individual tasks (see McDonough & McDonough: 1997: 176 – 177). The survey was given at the end of the third day of the unit, when I hoped the students would still recall the individual tasks.

The maximum score for each of these questions is 85. This represents a maximum possible evaluation of '5' from each of 17 students.

	Not Useful		Ok	Very Useful			
	1	2	3	4	5	TOT/85	%
TASK 1: Identify quotes & paraphrases from examples				5	12	80	94%
TASK 2: Identify differences in quotes & paraphrases			2	3	12	78	91%
TASK 3: Find active/passive sentences		1	3	6	7	70	82%
TASK 4: Identify the rules for paraphrasing			2	6	9	75	88%
TASK 5: Write paraphrases from listening			6	6	5	67	78%
TASK 6: Take notes on paraphrasing			5	7	5	68	80%
TASK 7: Analyze problems with paraphrases			3	5	9	74	87%
TASK 8: Write paraphrases from a variety of sources			3	8	6	71	83%
TASK 9: Revise the rules for paraphrasing			1	5	11	78	91%
TASK 10: Write paraphrases from your sources			4	6	7	71	83%

Average overall 'usefulness' rating of the unit from the perspective of the students 86%

This overall outcome appears quite positive. Our students fill out evaluation forms on each course that they take, and the 86% of positive comments on this unit is higher than past student satisfaction ratings on the course overall.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the qualitative and quantitative data generated by this study, I can say guardedly that the unit was successful. The overall sequencing of tasks worked well, as students progressed from 'noticing' to 'interacting' to 'reproducing' to 'producing' to 'creating.' (Nunan: 1993: 30). As Richards and Lockhart (1996:118) wrote, sequencing, transitions, and pacing are important elements in design. Transitions also went smoothly, but pacing was more difficult. There is a lot of material to cover in the six hours allotted to the unit. Furthermore, the unit may have been more successful in helping students with the conventions of paraphrasing, and less so in helping them express the ideas from the original material, possibly because expression is a more complex task.

The most obvious limitation of this study was time; the results of this analysis are not generalisable, even within the context of my own teaching environment. Without further study of the paraphrasing ultimately produced by students for their research papers, and comparison against a control group who have used different materials, it is not possible to say with certainty whether the students were able to produce 'better' paraphrases. Further, the small amount of data that was available for analysis from tasks eight and nine may not provide a fair basis for evaluation of the paraphrases produced by the general population of the class that piloted the unit.

However, at the time of this writing, the unit has been adopted as a regular part of the course, based on the subjective evaluation of its results by the teachers who work on the course. This gives some additional justification for viewing the unit as successful.

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COMM 149

Description:

In this level 4 block, you are required to write a research paper. Writing from research is often required both at universities and in business. This task is intended to give you useful practice in this important skill.

When you are writing from research, it is very important to be able to use the words and ideas of others appropriately in your own writing. We do this in three ways: summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting.

This unit focuses on paraphrasing. When you have completed this unit, you should be prepared to write good paraphrases for your research paper.

TASK 1

You will see four pieces of writing that include some examples of quotation and paraphrasing. You do not need to read carefully, or to understand the content of this work. **Use your skimming and scanning reading skills to find each quote and paraphrase. Highlight or underline them.** How many of each do you find?

TASK 2

You will see original quotes and paraphrases of the quotes. Compare the paraphrases to the quotes. **What differences do you notice** in the paraphrases? The first one is done for you as an example.

TASK 3

Changing sentence structures from active to passive is one especially useful tool when paraphrasing. **On pages 1 and 2 from task two, find at least three examples of passive structures used in paraphrases**.

TASK 4

With your team, **write a set of 'rules' for paraphrasing,** as you understand the process at this time. Your team should report the rules you find to the class.

Also, **make a list of the words and phrases** you have found that introduce paraphrases. Use the words and phrases from both tasks 1 and 2.

TASK 5

Now, try some paraphrasing yourself. Begin by listening. You may listen a couple of times, if you wish, to be sure you understand the main ideas. Then, type your paraphrase. Keep the rules your class determined in mind as you write.

Remember that you are reporting what you hear. Use your own words and sentence structure. *You should not try to reproduce the sentences that you hear!!* The original author will be noted on your screen so that you can include citation in your paraphrases. Number one gives you an example.

TASK 6

Now, go to the Purdue University Owl website. You will find it at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/research/r_paraphr.html
The printer in the lab will be turned off. Please read and take notes from the section: Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words. Then, if you have time, you can try some of the practice exercises on the website.

TASK 7

Work with your team to analyze the example paraphrases. Check them for:
6. too similar sentence structures
7. too many of the same words/phrases
8. ideas changed from the original
9. wrong/insufficient citation
10. no/incorrect introductory words/phrases

Work together to rewrite the paraphrases, making them better.

TASK 8

In this unit you will find fourteen clips from original pieces of writing.

Choose six that interest you. Try to produce the best possible paraphrases. Choose your 3 best paraphrases, and turn them in to the teacher. Remember to ask questions if you are not sure about any part of a paraphrase!

TASK 9

Now, in your team, revisit the rules for paraphrasing.

Do you need to add or change anything?

Do you each feel confident that you understand how to write paraphrases for your research papers?

If you still have any questions, this is the time to find out!!

TASK 10

Choose three excerpts from the references you plan to use for your research paper. Type the original three pieces as quotes and then write your own paraphrases, including citation.   You will be able to use these paraphrases as part of your research paper

SURVEY

This unit has been produced as a part of a research project by a teacher in the ELF program.

Your comments on the unit would be very much appreciated!!

1.Overall, how confident do you feel that you will be able to write good paraphrases for your research paper, now that you have completed this unit?

_____

_____

2.Please rate the tasks in terms of usefulness.

	Not Useful		Ok		Very Useful
TASK 1: Identify quotes & paraphrases from examples	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 2: Identify differences in quotes & paraphrases	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 3: Find active/passive sentences	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 4: Identify the rules for paraphrasing	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 5: Write paraphrases from listening	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 6: Take notes on paraphrasing	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 7: Analyze problems with paraphrases	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 8: Write paraphrases from a variety of sources	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 9: Revise the rules for paraphrasing	1	2	3	4	5
TASK 10: Write paraphrases from your sources	1	2	3	4	5

3. Did you find working on some of the tasks in teams was useful, or would   you prefer a different approach?

_____

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Please note your comments about this unit. Thank you very much for your feedback!!

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Deborah Novakova,, Instructor

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