**So That Nobody Has To Go To School If They Don't Want To**

*by Roger Sipher*

A decline in standardized test scores is but the most recent indicator that American education is in trouble.

One reason for the crisis is that present mandatory-attendance laws force many to attend school who have no wish to be there. Such children have little desire to learn and are so antagonistic to school that neither they nor more highly motivated students receive the quality education that is the birthright of every American.

The solution to this problem is simple: Abolish compulsory-attendance laws and allow only those who are committed to getting an education to attend.

This will not end public education. Contrary to conventional belief, legislators enacted compulsory-attendance laws to legalize what already existed. William Landes and Lewis Solomon, economists, found little evidence that mandatory-attendance laws increased the number of children in school. They found, too, that school systems have never effectively enforced such laws, usually because of the expense involved.

There is no contradiction between the assertion that compulsory attendance has had little effect on the number of children attending school and the argument that repeal would be a positive step toward improving education. Most parents want a high school education for their children. Unfortunately, compulsory attendance hampers the ability of public school officials to enforce legitimate educational and disciplinary policies and thereby make the education a good one.

Private schools have no such problem. They can fail or dismiss students, knowing such students can attend public school. Without compulsory attendance, public schools would be freer to oust students whose academic or personal behavior undermines the educational mission of the institution.

Has not the noble experiment of a formal education for everyone failed? While we pay homage to the homily, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink," we have pretended it is not true in education.

Ask high school teachers if recalcitrant students learn anything of value. Ask teachers if these students do any homework. Quite the contrary, these students know they will be passed from grade to grade until they are old enough to quit or until, as is more likely, they receive a high school diploma. At the point when students could legally quit, most choose to remain since they know they are likely to be allowed to graduate whether they do acceptable work or not.

Abolition of archaic attendance laws would produce enormous dividends.

First, it would alert everyone that school is a serious place where one goes to learn. Schools are neither day-care centers nor indoor street corners. Young people who resist learning should stay away; indeed, an end to compulsory schooling would require them to stay away.

Second, students opposed to learning would not be able to pollute the educational atmosphere for those who want to learn. Teachers could stop policing recalcitrant students and start educating.

Third, grades would show what they are supposed to: how well a student is learning. Parents could again read report cards and know if their children were making progress.

Fourth, public esteem for schools would increase. People would stop regarding them as way stations for adolescents and start thinking of them as institutions for educating America's youth.

Fifth, elementary schools would change because students would find out early they had better learn something or risk flunking out later. Elementary teachers would no longer have to pass their failures on to junior high and high school.

Sixth, the cost of enforcing compulsory education would be eliminated. Despite enforcement efforts, nearly 15 percent of the school-age children in our largest cities are almost permanently absent from school.

Communities could use these savings to support institutions to deal with young people not in school. If, in the long run, these institutions prove more costly, at least we would not confuse their mission with that of schools.

Schools should be for education. At present, they are only tangentially so. They have attempted to serve an all-encompassing social function, trying to be all things to all people. In the process they have failed miserably at what they were originally formed to accomplish.

Writers frequently intertwine summaries, paraphrases, and quotations. As part of a summary of an article, a chapter, or a book, a writer might include paraphrases of various key points blended with quotations of striking or suggestive phrases as in the following example:

In his famous and influential work On the Interpretation of Dreams, Sigmund Freud argues that dreams are the "royal road to the unconscious" (page #), expressing in coded imagery the dreamer's unfulfilled wishes through a process known as the "dream work" (page #). According to Freud, actual but unacceptable desires are censored internally and subjected to coding through layers of condensation and displacement before emerging in a kind of rebus puzzle in the dream itself (page #s).

#### How to use quotations, paraphrases, and summaries

Practice summarizing the following essay, using paraphrases and quotations as you go. It might be helpful to follow these steps:

* Read the entire text, noting the key points and main ideas.
* Summarize in your own words what the single main idea of the essay is.
* Paraphrase important supporting points that come up in the essay.
* Consider any words, phrases, or brief passages that you believe should be quoted directly.

#### A paraphrase is...

* Your own rendition of essential information and ideas expressed by someone else, presented in a new form.
* One legitimate way (when accompanied by accurate documentation) to borrow from a source.
* A more detailed restatement than a summary, which focuses concisely on a single main idea.

#### 6 Steps to Effective Paraphrasing

1. Reread the original passage until you understand its full meaning.
2. Set the original aside, and write your paraphrase on a note card.
3. Jot down a few words below your paraphrase to remind you later how you envision using this material. At the top of the note card, write a key word or phrase to indicate the subject of your paraphrase.
4. Check your rendition with the original to make sure that your version accurately expresses all the essential information in a new form.
5. Use quotation marks to identify any unique term or phraseology you have borrowed exactly from the source.
6. Record the source (including the page) on your note card so that you can credit it easily if you decide to incorporate the material into your paper.

### Some examples to compare

#### The original passage:

Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final [research] paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes. Lester, James D. Writing Research Papers. 2nd ed. (1976): 46-47.

#### A legitimate paraphrase:

In research papers students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester 46-47).

#### An acceptable summary:

Students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper (Lester 46-47).

#### A plagiarized version:

Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes.

**Guidelines for Summary Writing**

**1. Read the article carefully - twice!**

Remember this: a summary is mostly a ***reading*** exercise.  It is impossible to write an accurate summary after reading an article quickly or just one time.  Most problems in summary writing have more to do with understanding the text than writing the summary.

**2. Begin your summary by mentioning the author and title.  The publication and date may also be mentioned.**

Margaret Talbot's essay "The Gender Trap" (Washington Post Magazine 11/20/94) examines the value of women's colleges today.

**3. At least once more in your summary, remind the reader that you are summarizing by mentioning the author again - by last name, or full name (never refer to the author by first name only)**

Talbot finds strong support for women's colleges from many of their graduates.

**4. Avoid unnecessary details and direct quotes**

Summaries are supposed to give general information only; if the reader needs details, he needs to read the original piece.  Direct quotes are almost always unnecessary details.

**5. Don't give your own opinion**

The form and expression of a summary makes it clear to the reader that you are accurately presenting the ideas of another author.  If you add your own opinion to an otherwise well-formed summary, your opinion will appear to be that of the author's.

**6. Keep it short - one paragraph is best for many people**

There's no strict law about how long a summary can be, but since part of its purpose is to save time, it needs to be short.

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| 1. For a short writing exercise, don’t use blocks of long quotations. Use short quotes, paraphrase, and summary to bring up points from the text to advance your argument. A quotation longer than a couple of sentences is clearly a long quotation. Make the writing your words with quote helps, not big blocks of the text's words. |  |
| 2. Incorporate quotations into your writing. Don't leave a quotation as a sentence by itself. Use the incorporation techniques in 3 and following as a help; avoid the repetitive form in the example.    *Example of quotation by itself:* "Courage shall be the more, as our might lessens." This quotation shows Birhtwold's especially resolute attitude.  3. For a sentence quotation use an introduction sentence or signal phrase.          •    A colon can be a good connector with the introduction sentence. You decide a sentence quotation is telling, and you decide to use it as evidence. You introduce it with a summary or pointing sentence.    *Example:* Birhtwold, an older member of the Anglo-Saxon warrior group fighting at Maldon, exhorts his colleagues to be strong in a challenging situation   |  |  | | --- | --- | | "Courage shall be the more, as our might lessens."          •    A simple signal phrase can introduce the quotation. Usually a comma follows such a phrase. Signal phrases include constructions such as "he says," "Beowulf answers," "Mr. McGowan instructs." If they introduce a quotation, use a comma with them. (In some longer quotations for other courses, you'll use a colon : as an introducer.)    *Example:* Birhtwold shouts, "Purpose shall be the firmer, heart the keener, courage shall be the more, as our might lessens." |  | | 4. A very effective form of evidence is short quotations worked into your own sentence. Pick out the telling phrases and work them in. Such selections help you develop paragraphs.Often this type of quotation doesn’t use a comma introduction.    *Example:* Although Birhtwold is "an old retainer," he exhorts the other warriors to make their commitment "firmer" and "heart the keener." He emphasizes the importance of a resolute attitude at this challenging point in the battle. |  | |  |  | |  |

Write a paraphrase of each of the following passages. Read and reread them first, but when writing your paraphrase, try not to look back too much at the original passage.

1. "At some point in the assimilation to the new way, the immigrant child realizes that his or her parents are no longer sources of real knowledge about the new society. Their information and their way of life are no longer the way to success, and as soon as the child understands this, his or her attitude towards the parents changes. Though some people consider such changes to be a betrayal, they are an inevitable part of assimilation." (Adam Khutorsky, "Immigrants Adapting")

2. "The undermining of self, of a woman’s sense of her right to occupy space and walk freely in the world, is deeply relevant to education. The capacity to think independently, to take intellectual risks, to assert ourselves mentally, is inseparable from our physical way of being in the world, our feelings of personal integrity. If it is dangerous for me to walk home late from the library, *because I am a woman and can be raped*, how self-possessed, how exuberant can I feel as I sit working in the library? How much of my working energy is drained by the subliminal knowledge that, as a woman, I test my physical right to exist each time I go out alone?" (Adrienne Rich, "Taking Women Students Seriously")

3. "Email's intoxicating qualities are now well known: It's convenient, efficient, simple, and informal, a way to stay connected to more people, a democratizing force in the workplace and less intrusive than the telephone.  But as email proliferates, its more pernicious effects are increasingly evident. Much as it facilitates the conduct of business, email is threatening to overrun people's lives." (Tony Schwartz, "Going Postal")