When we really want to understand something, we paraphrase, using our words to express the author's ideas.

Think about it. Even if you are just reading instructions for how to put a simple bookcase together, you're going to paraphrase. The directions say "Place board 1 at a right angle to board 2," and you say to yourself, "This board goes on the corner of this one." What you've done is automatically paraphrase, or re-word, the directions to make sure you have understood them.

But paraphrasing while reading isn't just essential to concrete tasks like building a bookshelf. It's critical for reading textbooks as well. Paraphrasing while reading acts as a **comprehension check**. It tells you how well you have understood what you've just read. If you can paraphrase it, you can rest easy. You and the author have made contact. But if you can't, a re-reading is in order.

When the author's words are right in front of your eyes, it's easy to think you've understood their message. But if you can't recap the meaning in your own words, you probably haven't really understood the author's point.

Clearly, you don't want to make that discovery the day before a test. On the contrary, you need to identify passages you don't understand *while* you are reading. That way you can (1) adjust your reading rate and re-read the passage more slowly, (2) mark it for a later re-reading, or (3) ask someone for help understanding the passage.

Equally important, paraphrasing gives your brain a chance to store what you have learned from your reading in long-term memory. As you search your mind for word substitutes that allow you to paraphrase, your brain is re-processing what you have just read. The double processing is a memory booster.

◆ EXERCISE 6 Practice with Paraphrasing

DIRECTIONS Read the following quotations from famous people. Put each one into your own words. *Note*: Your paraphrase may be longer than the original. All the people quoted are famous writers and that was part of their gift—to say a lot in few words.

EXAMPLE "Many of the things you can count, don't count. Many of the things you can't count, really count." —Albert Einstein

Concrete things like possessions and money are not what's important. What's important are more abstract things like happiness, love, and a sense of well-being.

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