



## **Classroom Assessment Techniques: Directed Paraphrasing**

*Directed Paraphrasing* is a technique that forces instructors and students to consider the wider relevance of content. Particularly useful for fields that require experts to translate specialized information in a way that clients or customers will understand, this technique is a worthwhile scaffold for helping students develop such skills.

In many fields such as education, law, accounting, and engineering, much of a student's eventual success depends on an ability to effectively communicate complex ideas using non-technical language. *Directed Paraphrasing* is a useful mechanism for assessing students' abilities to explain concepts in ways that will likely be required of them when they enter their given profession.

### **Procedures for implementing *Directed Paraphrasing* are as follows:**

1. Select an important theory, concept, or argument that students have studied in depth. Ideally, this topic should have relevance beyond class work.
2. Determine a realistic audience for the paraphrase of this topic, what the purpose of such a paraphrase should be, and an appropriate length of the paraphrase—either in written words or amount of speaking time. If students are especially well-versed in the subject, you may want to assign the same paraphrase topic for two different audiences.
3. Try the paraphrase yourself to ensure you can create an effective paraphrase within the given constraints.
4. Ask students to prepare a paraphrase of the selected topic. Tell them the intended audience, the purpose, and the limits in terms of word count, sentences, or speaking time. You may either ask students to write their paraphrases or you may require video recordings.

If you collect written versions of each *Directed Paraphrase*, you can separate responses into categories such as “confused,” “minimal,” “satisfactory,” and “exceptional.” Then you can compare responses within and across categories. Providing examples of particularly successful paraphrases is often helpful for students.



**Important notes:**

This *Classroom Assessment Technique* requires a fair amount of planning on the part of faculty. Well-planned and structured directions will make the activity more meaningful to students.

This technique is also more meaningful when the task feels authentic. Because of this, you may want to consider expressing this *CAT* in the form of a scenario.

**Consider offering guidelines that begin:**

“Imagine that you have been invited to give a talk...”

“In plain language and no more than five minutes, paraphrase what you understand about \_\_\_ for the vice president of an insurance firm. Your aim is to....”

“In one or two sentences, explain to a patient...”

Paraphrasing tasks can be challenging. If students are going to learn from the process, this *CAT* should be used more than once during a semester and targeted feedback should be offered.