Misunderstood activity: Summarizing and Paraphrasing

In my Communications class a concept that is often misunderstood is summarizing or paraphrasing content they are using from another source in their essay or assignment. This is an important concept to understand for several reasons. First, to prevent plagiarism it is important that students are aware of how to summarize or paraphrase information into their own words. Second, and more important, is that by being able to summarize and paraphrase content it demonstrates their understanding of the content. If one simple copies the content it does not show that they understand the information that is being shared. If they are able to read the text and take time to think about it and ensure they understand it, they will then be able to write to show that they do understand it and it can then be added in to their work to make their writing stronger. Even if the assignment is verbal instead of written, if able to explain it well it will help their audience understand the content being shared as well. This is often a misunderstood or difficult concept to learn if they are pressed for time due to a high course load, if English is not their first language, or if the language used in the text is quite difficult to read or understand especially if it is technical or specialized to the field.

An analogy that can be used to help understand this concept is:

* Think of when you go to a movie and you are telling your friend about the movie you just saw or it could be a tv show as well. You don’t describe in detail the entire movie or tv show, you will highlight the most important or the most interesting information about the movie and you won’t remember exactly word for word what was said in the movie, you will describe it in your own words. The same example if you read a book or watched a Youtube video or TikTok video, you provide the key information to your friend in your own words.
* That is what summarizing or paraphrasing is, you are reading an article or information from a book and you now need to explain it to your friend in your own words.
* An image I created to help understand this is below: