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*The Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution Newsletter
State of Hawaii, Judiciary*



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Rephrasing and Summarizing for Clarity

Think of the times you've ended up in an argument because you thought you did what someone wanted only to find out that you didn't even come close. The consequence of this sort of mistake isn't limited to doing the wrong thing but also raises the question of *how* you could get it so wrong. Taking time to confirm the interpretation of the message could solve this problem.

Mediators regularly rephrase and request confirmation from the speaker so both parties can hear the message in different words. The speaker can offer correction, if needed, while the listener gets to process a calmer, less emotional statement that still conveys the same sense.

Here are a few guidelines for effective rephrasing:

- Be sure to use your own words and don't "parrot" what the speaker said.
- Take time to organize your thoughts. You may want to say something like, "Let me think about this for a minute to make sure I understand."
- Make sure to listen for emotion as well as content.
- When you're ready to offer your paraphrase, try something like, "Let me see if I understand," offer your paraphrase, then end with a question to ask for confirmation, such as "Is that right?"
- Speak calmly and don't rush your words. Take time to show the other person that you want to understand.
- Consider it a success if the speaker corrects your statement. More information will help you better understand the message. Keep paraphrasing and checking for confirmation until you have agreement.