

7.9 PRÉCIS WRITING

Précis (pronounced pray-see) is the summary of a written work. It is not an outline, but a shortened version, if well-written, it can be substituted for the original work. The main ideas and the substance of the original work should be contained in the shortened version.

7.9.1 Advantages of Précis Writing

The following are the advantages of précis writing:

1. Writing précis helps you in careful reading. Writing précis requires careful reading of the text several times to understand what is essential and what is non-essential.
2. It improves your vocabulary as one has to write précis in his or her words.
3. It also improves your creative writing, as you write the essence of the text in your own words.

7.9.2 Steps for Précis Writing

While writing précis the following steps are followed:

1. Write down the key points of the text you think are important.
2. Identify the purpose of the writing (what the writer wants to convey).
3. Build a rough draft around the purpose.
4. Read the original text again and again and see if your points remain the same or if you narrow down to the exact points.
5. Compare with the original work to see if the essence is fully preserved.
6. Finally, identify a suitable title and make the final draft.

Note: It is a generally accepted fact that a précis should be 1/3rd of the original text in number of words. So, it is important to keep a count of words.

Consider the following passage:

Trees give shade for the benefit of others, and while they themselves stand in the sun and endure the scorching heat, they produce the fruit of which others profit. The character of good men is like that of trees. What is the use of this perishable body if no use is made of it for the benefit of mankind? Sandalwood, the more it is rubbed, the more scent does it yield. Sugarcane, the more it is peeled and cut up into pieces, the more juice does it produce. The men who are noble at heart do not lose their qualities even in losing their lives. What matters whether men praise them or not? What difference does it make whether they die at this moment or whether lives are prolonged? Happen what may, those who tread in the right path will not set foot in any other. Life itself is unprofitable to a man who does not live for others. To live for the mere sake of living one's life is to live the life of dog and crows. Those who lay down their lives for the sake of others will assuredly dwell forever in a world of bliss.

Let us now try to write the précis of the passage (as given in the previous page) by following three steps:

Step 1: First Draft

Title: Good men live for others

Outline: The character of good men is like that of trees _____. What is the use of this perishable body if no use is made of it for the benefit of mankind _____. The men who are noble at heart do not lose their qualities even in losing their lives _____. Those who tread in the right path will not set foot in any other _____. To live for the mere sake of living one's life is to live the life of dogs or crows _____. Those who lay down their lives for the sake of others will assuredly dwell forever in a world of bliss.

Step 2: Find an apt title – Good men live for others

Step 3: Final Draft

Good Men Live for Others

The character of good men is like that of trees. They live for others and do not lose their qualities even in losing their lives. They always follow the right path. Praise is immaterial to them. To live for one's own sake is to lead the life of beasts. Only those who lay down their lives for others will live forever in a world of bliss.

7.9.3 Challenges in Précis Writing

Précis writing has two major challenges. They are as follows:

1. **Identifying the key points:** Sometimes the given text is enriched with elaborate discussions and examples, such that it is difficult for the readers to identify the key points or the essence of the content. It requires thorough understanding aided by careful reading to dig out the points around which the précis needs to be written.
2. **Converting the points to own words:** Writing in own words can be difficult. It is necessary that in a précis writing, one should not copy the exact sentences from the original work. Knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is required to convert the key points to a well-written original paragraph.

7.9.4 Dos and Don'ts in Précis Writing

While writing précis, note the following:

1. **Do not judge the original text:** The basic idea behind précis writing is give an essence of the text, reviewing its broader implications, not a review of the text as such.
2. **Do not refer to the original text:** Précis is not a write-up by you referring to the original text, but it's a summary of the text. So, one should avoid mentioning the text like in the article or in the passage, etc. in précis.
3. Do not use abbreviations or contractions.
4. Use past tense while writing history.

7.9.5 Précis vs Comprehension

Précis gives a summary of the given text. Précis writing requires critical reading of the text. Comprehension is a test of the level of understanding of the text by recognising the words and their contextual meaning. The trick in comprehending depends on your ability in word recognition.