



Précis writing (Aminotes)

What is a Précis ?

A précis is like a miniature portrait of the passage: it retains the absolute essential points accompanied with the mood and tone of the author of the passage. The one aspect one must be careful about is that one should not add one's subjective interpretation or comments to the précis and should try to retain the original author's voice and opinions. As far as the writing style is concerned, one must ensure that one write clear and effective sentences (no rambling) and one's diction is flawless. Ultimately, it is the coherence of the views that you presented in the précis that matter, and this can be achieved by making sure that one is precise and to the point in one's approach. Unnecessarily long sentences or rambling thoughts are not required in précis writing, and one should make sure that one shifts from one point to another in a smooth manner. At the end of the day, the précis should make sense and be logical in its presentation.

While keeping the above in mind, you need to keep in mind what a précis is not. The following are some of things that should not be a part of or a reflection of the précis:

- simply a summary of a passage.
- simply an abstract of a passage.
- an outline of a passage.
- a mere selection of a few important sentences from a passage.
- a collection of disconnected facts and statements.

Features of a Good Précis

A good Précis:

- is marked by clarity, brevity and precision.
- is not just lifting of the sentences from the original. It should be written in the précis writer's own words.
- is a miniature version of the original passage.
- must have a logical order and be well-knit and well connected.
- must have coherence; must use linking devices such as so, therefore, and, because further etc. and must follow the
- order of ideas of the original.
- must have a title.
- is written in reported speech.
- must not contain any details not found in the original.

Do's in a précis:

- Start your précis by highlighting the main idea of the passage and you should create contextual environment where you can place the necessary points. Once the main idea is established in the précis, you can present the methods, points, facts etc. used by the author of the passage.
- Compress and clarify a lengthy passage, article, or book, while retaining important concepts, key words, and important data.
- Remove what is superfluous and retain the core essence of the work.
- Always remember that mentions about history/writing about history should be advisably done in the past tense.
- State the purpose of the research or piece of writing (why was it important to conduct this research or write on this topic?)

Don'ts in a précis:

- Do not express your own opinion, wish, remark or criticism.
- Do not insert any question in your précis. Its significance, if essential, may be expressed by a statement.
- Do not use abbreviations or contractions.
- Do not be jerky. This suggests that most probably, you have not understood the sense of the passage properly.

Writing a Precis of a given passage.

Sample Passage:

There is an enemy beneath our feet - an enemy more deadly for his complete impartiality. He recognizes no national boundaries, no political parties. Everyone in the world is threatened by him. The enemy is the earth itself. When an earthquake strikes, the world trembles. The power of a quake is greater than anything man himself can produce. But today scientists are directing a great deal of their effort into finding some way of combating earthquakes, and it is possible that at some time in the near future mankind will have discovered a means of protecting itself from earthquakes. An earthquake strikes without warning. When it does, its power is immense. If it strikes a modern city, the damage it causes is as great as if it has struck a primitive village. Gas mains burst, explosions are caused and fires are started. Underground railways are wrecked. Buildings collapse, bridges fall, dams burst, gaping crevices appear in busy streets. If the quake strikes at sea, huge tidal waves sweep inland. If it strikes in mountain regions, avalanches roar down into the valley. Consider the terrifying statistics from the past 1755: Lisbon, capital of Portugal - the city destroyed entirely and 450 killed. 1970: Peru: 50,000 killed. In 1968 an earthquake struck Alaska. As this is a



relatively unpopulated part, only a few people were killed. But it is likely that this was one of the most powerful quakes ever to have hit the world. Geologists estimate that during the tremors, the whole of the state moved over 80 feet farther west into the Pacific Ocean. Imagine the power of something that can move an entire subcontinent! This is the problem that the scientists face. They are dealing with forces so immense that man cannot hope to resist them. All that can be done is to try to pinpoint just where the earthquake will strike and work from there. At least some precautionary measures can then be taken to save lives and some of the property. (330 Words)'

Based on the above paragraph, we arrive at the following theme sentences for the four paragraphs:

- Earthquake - the deadly enemy of mankind.
- Damage caused by an earthquake in general.
- Damage caused by an earthquake-in particular,
- What can the scientists do?

The above four theme sentences can be developed into the following outline:

Earthquake - the deadly enemy of mankind.

- Earthquake strikes all without a distinction of national boundary or political affiliation.
- The power of a quake is greater than that of a man-made weapon of destruction.
- Scientists are trying to find out means to combat earthquakes; they will find some way to protect themselves from earthquakes.

Damage caused by an earthquake in general:

- Strikes without warning.
- Modern city when struck reduced to a primitive village.

Damage caused by an earthquake in particular.

- Quake strikes plains, seas and mountains causing all round destruction.
- In 1755, Lisbon destroyed, 450 killed.
- In 1970, Peru struck, 50,000 killed.

What can the scientists do?

- In 1968, Alaska hit, subcontinent moved 80 feet into the Pacific Ocean.
- Scientists cannot resist the powerful earthquake.
- They can predict the place of origin of the quake so that precaution can be taken to save man & property.

The final draft would look as follows:

Earthquake - The Great Destroyer

Earthquake is the mankind's deadly enemy. Earthquake strikes all without a distinction of nationality or political affiliation. The power of a quake is greater than that of any man-made weapon of destruction. An earthquake strikes mankind without a warning. A modern city when struck is reduced -to a nibble. A quake strikes plains, seas and mountains causing all round destruction. The quake struck Lisbon in 1755 killing 450; Peru in 1970 killing 50,000; Alaska in 1968 moving it 80 feet into the Pacific Ocean. Scientists are trying to find out means to combat earthquakes, to predict the origin of the quake so that precaution can be taken to save man and property from destruction.(115 words)