
UNIT 9 TECHNIQUES OF SUMMARISING

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you write summaries of passages by giving you practice in

- identifying the main ideas
- separating details from main ideas
- removing repetition or restatement
- making use of grammatical features to determine the importance of the ideas being presented
- giving importance to the words which link sentences and ideas
- becoming aware of how ideas in a passage are systematically linked to each other.

We will also help you write a summary taking into account a particular point of view.

After you have worked through the unit you should be able to write summaries of your own.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Writing summaries is a very important activity. Its use in your practical life is obvious. As a student you have to summarise information, which you may need to remember later on – in an exam or test. For instance while working in an office it is often necessary to summarise the discussions of meetings, the contents of reports, and so on. In addition, summary writing is also very good training for the mind. The separation of the important from less important ideas and the ability to condense information help in developing your mental faculties.

In this unit, we shall be dealing with some of the techniques that will help you write a good summary.

9.2 THE TECHNIQUE OF SUMMARISING

Example 1

You are now going to read a passage about the river Nile. As you know the Nile is a great river in Africa, which flows through and gives life to the plains of Egypt. Now, go ahead and read the passage trying to grasp its meaning.

The Nile

The great river Nile flows gently in its course through the hot plains in the first half of the year, but later on, when the melting snows and the rains on the mountains far to the south swell its tributaries, the Nile overflows. It spreads rich, muddy soil from Ethiopia over its valley and forms deep stretches of green, fertile lands along its banks. The settlers found that in the soft, rich earth, barley and wheat and other

crops could be planted, even without the use of the plough, and they began to make many settlements of farmers. They used stone implements for tilling the soil, and flint for their weapons; and as time passed they learnt the use of copper.

Glossary

Swell its tributaries: the rain water increases the volume of water in the tributaries of the River Nile.

tributary: a stream or river that flows into a larger river

settlers: the first people who began to live there

flint: a very hard kind of stone used to produce fire

Now you will read the passage a second time, sentence by sentence. After reading each sentence you will state which words you think you can remove from that sentence without destroying its meaning for the passage. Then, we shall discuss the reasons for including/deleting certain words, before proceeding with the next sentence in the same way. We can put together, in paragraph form, the new sentences that we have created by means of these deletions or removal of words. These will form a summary of the passage.

Now read the opening sentence

- (1) The great river Nile flows gently in its course through the hot plains in the first half of the year but later on when the melting snows and the rains on the mountains far to the south swell its tributaries, the Nile overflows.

Notice that the main statement here is ‘the great river Nile flows gently in its course through the hot plains in the first half of the year, but later on, the Nile overflows’. The clause that has just been removed, namely, ‘when the melting snows and the rains on the mountains far to the south swell its tributaries’, is a less important part of the statement as it only gives further information relating to the words ‘later on’. It is for this reason that it can be removed without damaging the basic meaning of the sentence. Notice also that this is a **subordinate clause; hence, it contains less important information than the main clause. What we have retained so far is the entire main clause.** It is important to learn to separate the main clause from its subordinate clauses in order to understand where the basic meaning of the sentence lies and where the details.

Notice also that in the main clause stated above, other phrases can be cut down to remove some details, which are not absolutely essential. Remember that we are trying to summarise, and in summaries there is bound to be loss of detail and of richness of information. Details are necessary in full-scale writing but not in summaries. Now, try and see which phrases you feel can be removed from the main clause above, without destroying its basic meaning. In the blank space below, note down the words you wish to remove.

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Have you chosen to remove any of the following?

- i) through the hot plains
- ii) in the first half of the year
- iii) gently in its course.

You cannot obviously, remove, ‘The great river Nile flows’ without damaging the basic meaning of the sentence, so that has not been considered a possibility. Let us, then, consider which of the three word groups given above you can possibly remove without much harm. Notice that ‘through the hot plains’ is a contrast to the melting snows, but the line in which the ‘melting snows’ occurs has already been found to be a detail and has been removed. So, the contrast with ‘the hot plains’ is not required here. Let us read the sentence without this phrase:

(1a). The great river Nile flows gently in its course in the first half of the year but later on the Nile overflows.

Do you agree that the sentence still conveys the basic sense of the original?

Can the other two word groups (ii,iii) be removed as well? What will happen if 'in the first half of the year' is removed from 1a? If this is done, the contrast with 'but later on', which is necessary for the sentence, will be lost and the sentence as a whole will not remain meaningful. Hence (ii) has to be kept even in the summary.

Can 'gently in its course' be removed? No, because it is being contrasted with 'but later on the Nile overflows'. The phrase is required in order to show the behaviour of the Nile at certain times with its behaviour at other times. So you cannot cut down the sentence any further.

Now read the sentence-

- (2) It spreads rich, muddy soil from Ethiopia over its valley and forms deep stretches of greenlands along its banks.

You notice that what is being described here is the action of the river. Is there anything in this sentence, which is not absolutely essential for its meaning?

Consider which words you can remove and write these words in the blank space below. Both single words and phrases can be cut out.

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Once you have written something down, look at the following words/phrases.

Have you removed any of these? (i) rich (ii) muddy (iii) from Ethiopia (iv) deep (v) stretches of green (vi) fertile

Let us consider which words can in fact be deleted. In doing this, you have first to be careful to retain the most important words, from the point of view of the meaning. The sentence states that during its course the Nile spreads rich soil over its valley and forms fertile lands along its banks. So, if you delete the word 'rich' or 'fertile' from your version of the sentence, the meaning will be lost. But you can in order to shorten the sentence remove (ii), (iii) (iv) and (v) above, because these words relate to the sub-ideas and not the main idea of the sentence.

You may now ask: how can one distinguish whether the words referred to contain the main idea or merely details of the main idea? Let us try analysing the sentence in order to answer such a question. The sentence states what the function of the Nile is. The richness of the soil and the fact that this makes the ground fertile is seen as the main function of the river. Notice that 'muddy' is a detail of 'rich soil' and 'green' is a detail of 'fertile'. Again, the phrase 'from Ethiopia', while providing useful information about the course of the river, is not essential for describing the action of the river. Thus, we can summarise (2) to read:

(2a) 'it spreads rich soil over its valley and forms fertile lands along its banks'.

Now read on

- (3) The settlers found that in the soft rich earth, barley and wheat and other crops could be planted, even without the use of the plough, and they began to make many settlements of farmers.

What can you remove from this sentence without damaging its basic meaning? In the blank space below, write down what you think can be deleted.

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Now that you have chosen to remove some words, check if you have deleted any of the following;

- (i) soft (ii) rich (iii) barley and wheat (iv) even without the use of the plough.

If you read the sentence carefully, you will find that not only the richness but also the softness of the soil is important here because of the statement that crops can be planted without the use of the plough. So (i) and (ii) cannot be removed without damage to the sense. Notice that (iv) is required because it indicates an amazing softness of soil, something that normal fertile soil doesn't possess. So it needs to be retained. Examples of crops as in (iii), on the other hand, can perhaps be removed. It is possible to condense this part of the sentence to 'a number of crops could be planted.'

Another kind of change is also possible. You will notice a similarity between the words 'settlers' and 'settlements of farmers'. Can we cut down some of the common words? In order to do this, the sentence will have to be rewritten in a shortened form. The condensed sentence can then read:

(3 a) 'Many settlements of farmers were formed there because of the soft, rich earth on which a number of crops could be planted even without the use of the plough.'

Now read the last line of this paragraph.

- 4) They used stone implements for tilling the soil, and flint for their weapons; and as time passed they learnt the use of copper.

Do you think any words can be removed from here? If so, write down these words in the blank space below.

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You may find it difficult to select the words, which can be removed from here. Remember that it is not always possible to do so. In this case, it may, instead, be possible to reduce the length of the sentence by writing a generalisation to cover the examples listed here. The examples given are:

- i) making stone implements for tilling the soil
ii) using flint for their weapons
iii) using copper

What general statement can you make to cover these examples? Write this down in the blanks space given below before reading further.

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Perhaps it is possible to say:

(4a) They learnt the art of tool-making with the use of stone, flint and copper.

Tool-making can cover the making of tools and weapons. It is possible to remove 'with the use of stone flint and copper' from (4 a) if you consider this a detail. But the kind of materials used is historically so important that it seems desirable to retain, that is, not to remove the mention of stone, flint and copper. The condensed sentence then reads as given above in (4 a).

Summary

The great river Nile flows gently in its course in the first half of the year, but later on it overflows. It spreads rich soil over its valley and forms fertile lands along its banks. Many settlements of farmers were formed there because of the soft, rich earth on which a number of crops could be planted even without the use of the plough. They learnt the art of tool-making with the use of stone, flint and copper.

Compare this with the original passage. As it contains all the essential points of the original, it can be considered a summary of it. Notice that the task of separating these points was made easy because you had to shorten only one sentence at a time. So, now you can feel confident that if you follow this method, you cannot go far wrong. You are not required to write new sentences of your own or to combine sentences from the passage. All you have to do is to remove those points that are not absolutely essential to the meaning.

Please remember that this is only one form of summary. We shall deal with other ways of summarising later.

9.3 SOME MORE TECHNIQUES OF SUMMARISING

In example 1, we showed you one way of summarising a passage. Now we shall acquaint you with another method of summarising a passage.

Example 2

You are now going to read a passage on how agriculturists are learning to deal with creatures who harm crops. In recent years, there has been a growing use of insecticides, but the passage given below suggests that other ways of dealing with the harmful creatures or pests are being developed and successfully used. Now read the passage.

Integrated Pest Management

1. (1) Agricultural pests are winning the battle against the poisonous chemicals in pesticides. (2) As each new chemical pesticide is used, the insects or rodents gradually become used to it (3) The pests change themselves so that they are not killed by the poison. (4) Therefore, farmers, scientists, and food planners are trying a new method to control the pests that attack their crops. (5) This method is called Integrated Pest Management or IPM.
2. Integrated pest management is a plan that combines several different methods to destroy insects and rodents. These methods are specifically developed for individual areas and crops. The control methods include using the pests' natural enemies, controlling the pests' breeding environment, and developing stronger strains of seeds. Chemical poisons are used only when necessary. The IPM method accepts the fact that it is useless to try to destroy pests completely with chemical poisons. Its aim is to control pest populations so that crops can still grow well.
3. Cotton farmers in Texas have been using the IPM method. The farmers find this the best combination of control methods for their needs. In this way, they can produce crops without using too many chemical poisons. In 1977, three-quarters of the cotton fields in Texas received no insecticides at all. That year's cotton crop was better than average. The IPM methods showed the farmers a better way to control the pests in their fields.
4. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has been studying agricultural pests and chemicals. It has found that 223 pests are resistant to, or not affected by, insecticides. Rodents, including rats, are also gaining resistance to poisons. In 1965, another UN organisation, the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, listed 182 resistant types of pests. Three years later, there were 228 species on the resistant list. The 1977 survey raised the number to 364 species. Because so many pests are becoming resistant to chemical poisons. It is necessary to find another method of control. By using 'Integrated Pest Management', farmers can still control and limit pests without depending on chemical poisons'.

(From Zakowski-Faust, J. Johnston, S.S. and Atkinson C.S. : *Between the Lines*, Copyright @ 1983 by Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc., reprinted by permission of the publisher)

Glossary

pesticides: substances used to destroy troublesome or destructive creatures like insects, mice, etc.

rodents: animals like rats, rabbits, squirrels, which bite at things with their strong teeth

breeding: where the animal is born and develops

strains: varieties

resistant to: offering resistance to; opposing; not being affected by

We are now going to make a summary of the passage by looking for the important ideas in each paragraph.

Let us start with paragraph I. Re-read this paragraph and find a line that states the main idea. Write down that line here. It is not always possible to find the main idea stated in a single sentence. Quite often it is to be put together from many different sentences. If the main idea can be found in one sentence that sentence is called a topic sentence.

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Did you choose sentence 1 as your topic sentence?

Agricultural pests are winning the battle against the poisonous chemicals in pesticides.

Notice that sentence 2 merely explains the meaning of sentence 1. Sentence 3 gives a little more information about the same point. What about sentences 4 and 5? You can see that these provide a new point. The two sentences (4 and 5) can be combined to form.

'Therefore, farmers, scientists and food planners are trying a new method to control the pests that attack their crops, namely, Integrated Pest Management(IPM)'.

What is the relationship between sentence 1 on the one hand and sentences 4 and 5 on the other hand? Write down the answer here, before looking ahead:

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Sentence 1 states the general position - the problem. Sentences 4 and 5 state the solution to this problem. Note that both the problem and the solution make up the topic of paragraph 1.

What is the relationship of the rest of the passage to these sentences? Rapidly look over paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 and state the nature of that relationship here before looking ahead:

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The rest of the passage contains a development of the idea of Integrated Pest Management: what it consists of, how it is used, and its effect. It is therefore an expansion of the solution to the problem stated in paragraph 1.

Now, look for the important sentences in paragraph 2, which develop the main idea. Write them down here:

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Have you written down the following?

'Integrated pest management is a plan that combines several different methods to destroy insects and rodents. Its aim is to control pest populations so that crops can still grow well'.

As you can see, the first and the last sentence of this paragraph have been chosen because these contain the main ideas. However, is this information enough to summarise paragraph 2? If you look again, you will find that crucial items are left out. What are these? Go back to paragraph 2 and find out what other information is required to be stated. Write this down here:

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The points to be taken from paragraph 2 read thus:

'Integrated pest management' is a plan that combines several different methods to destroy insects and rodents. Its aim is to control pest populations so that crops can still grow well, by using the pests' natural enemies, controlling the pests' breeding environment, and developing stronger strains of seeds.

Can you cut out any words from here? Write down what you can remove.

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Now check your answer.

- i) 'Integrated Pest Management' has already been mentioned in full in the sentence we have retained from paragraph 1. The same sentence also states its short form 'IPM' in brackets. Therefore, the next sentence to be included in the summary, i.e. from paragraph 2, need not repeat 'Integrated Pest Management' in full. It can be referred to simply as 'IPM'.
- ii) The word 'pests' is repeated in the summary of paragraph 2. We can therefore, change the second use of 'the pests' to 'their'. The sentence will then read.

'.....by using the pests' natural enemies, controlling *their* breeding environment.....'

Now condense paragraph 3. Bear in mind what has already been stated in the summaries of paragraphs 1 and 2 above and choose only what seems to be necessary from paragraph 3 to continue the argument.

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Here is a hint: a specific example has been given here. This is too long to repeat. Choose only one aspect of the example to make the required point that the IPM method is successful. Write this down here if you have not already written it in the blanks given above.

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Perhaps the most important part of the example is 'The cotton crop in Texas in 1977 was better than average'. To produce this, parts of two sentences have been combined. The other details are not required in a summary.

Now read paragraph 4 and note down the main idea expressed in it. Don't get confused by the details. Try and find the general point.

State it here-

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Have you noted down the following:

'The U.N. Environmental Programme has found that a large number of pests are resistant to insecticides so it is necessary to find another method of control.'

Notice that this sentence is drawn from different parts of the paragraph. 'The United Nations' has been shortened to 'The U.N.', but not U.N.E.P. The U.N. is a well-known organisation, so it will be recognised by its initials, but the Environmental Programme run by the U.N. is not generally so well-known, so it needs to be stated in full. A number of figures are given about the pests that have been studied and found to be resistant to insecticides. These cannot be stated separately but have to be contained within a generalisation 'a large number of pests'. The second last sentence of the paragraph is the main sentence for the summary.

Now rewrite all the main points that we have put down separately together here:

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'Agricultural pests are winning the battle against the poisonous chemicals in pesticides. Therefore farmers, scientists and food planners are trying a new method to control the pests that attack their crops, namely Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is a plan that combines several different methods to destroy insects and rodents. Its aim is to control pest populations so that crops can still grow well, by using the pests' natural enemies, controlling their breeding environment, and developing stronger strains of seeds. The cotton crop in Texas in 1977 was better than average. The U.N. Environmental Programme has found that a large number of pests are resistant to insecticides, so it is necessary to find another method of control.'

Now consider this summary carefully.

- i) Are all the points connected to form a single argument? And are all the sentences properly linked? If you read carefully you will find that one of the sentences has no proper linking word to connect it to the previous sentence. Which sentence is this? What linking words would you add? Answer these questions here before reading ahead.
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The last sentence but one is not related to the previous one. It is necessary to add something else such as 'As a result of using the IPM, the cotton crop in Texas in 1977 was better than average.' By the addition of these words a reason is given for the improvement of the cotton crop.

- ii) Is there any repetition of ideas anywhere in this summary? Write down the sentence that reports the same information.
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You will have noticed that the first and the last lines of this summary repeat the same points in different words. So, perhaps it is possible to cut out one of the lines. The last sentence can very easily be removed because mention of the U.N. Environmental Programme is not particularly important to the development of the argument. So the summary is complete without the last sentence.

Let us go over the steps we took to write this summary.

- i) we isolated the main point or points in each paragraph
ii) we then put them all together as a summary
iii) and finally, we looked at the summary to check for repetition of ideas and removed the repetition.
The summary also lacked connection between one of the examples and the main idea. In that case, linkers or connecting words were required in order to make it read properly. You must follow these steps when writing a summary.

Now let's attempt to summarise another passage. We will also show you how to summarise this passage from a particular point of view.

Example 3

You are now going to read the passage about plastic materials. These have become common only during the past few decades. This passage deals with the nature of plastic materials and with the question of whether or not they cause environmental damage. Now read the passage.

The World of Plastics

1. Plastic has long been with us. It became well-known in the 1930's and particularly the 1940's through a great deal of publicity, as a major substitute for other materials. Since then—with far less fanfare—it has

steadily increased its influence over our lives. In 1976, plastic outstripped steel to become America's most widely used material.

2. The basic raw materials for the manufacture of plastic are petroleum and natural gas, but plastic can also be made from coal or – if need be – even from wood. These hydrocarbon materials are processed into a waxy, mouldable (hence the word ‘plastic’) stuff called resin.
3. Environmentally, plastics have a good deal to recommend them. Plastic requires, only one-tenth of the energy required to produce aluminium, and in spite of the enormous volume involved, plastic accounts for only five per cent of U.S. petroleum consumption. But plastics also present some special problems. Although the basic resin-manufacturing process presents a much cleaner face than a steel mill (there is little smoke and soot), it is also true that many of the ingredients are dangerous. Benzene, for example, which goes into the manufacture of styrene, epoxy, polyester and nylon, is a member of the dangerous family of carcinogens. Common types of plastic produce toxic gases in fires, including hydrogen cyanide and hydrogen chloride. The plastics industry counterargues that natural materials such as wood also produce toxic gases when burned, and that non-plastics may be more prone to catching fire or starting fires (as in the case of metal electrical housings). Carbon-reinforced plastics create a particular problem – when burned, they release clouds of tiny fibres that can get into electrical equipment and cause short circuits.
4. One concern of environmentalists is that many plastics are neither biodegradable nor can they be easily recycled, and that used plastic is increasing our already staggering solid waste and litter problem. Recycling plastic bottles does not have the economic incentive that recycling aluminium cans or even glass does, but manufacturers are working to make it more practical.
5. For all that, there is little question that there will be more plastic in our future. Visionary plastic enthusiasts argue that plastic houses will be common place 20 to 30 years from now, and, if costs drop, even plastic bridges and domes to cover whole towns could follow. And so, regardless of how we feel about it, we might as well prepare ourselves. Leo Baekeland genie has been out of the bottle for almost 30 years now; no one is going to put it back in.

(From ‘The Plastic World’ by James R. Chills, *Span* Oct. 1986, reprinted from *Smithsonian*)

Glossary

Fanfare: announcement of a special event

outstrip: do better than

mouldable: a soft substance such as clay or plastic, which can be made into a particular shape

carcinogen: substance that causes cancer

toxic: poisonous

biogradable: than can be broken down by bacteria.

recycling: making use of used materials waste

Leo Baekeland: the man whose name is associated with the invention of plastic

genie: a supernatural creature: a spirit

The genie has been out of the bottle: This means that it is impossible to stop the development of plastic in today's world.

We are now going to make a summary of the passage by looking for the important ideas in each paragraph. This will enable us to arrive at the central idea of the passage and to separate the ideas from the illustrations of these ideas. By now you are familiar with how to identify the main points of paragraphs. Write out these main points paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraph 1 :

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Paragraph 2 :

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Paragraph 3 : The effect of plastic on the environment:

a) Favourable:

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

b) Unfavourable:

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

Paragraph 4 :

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Paragraph 5 :

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If you have had problems finding the main points, we shall discuss how to do so now. Look at Paragraph 1. What does it tell us? The first two sentences say that plastic has long been with us and that it became well-known in the 1930s as a major substitute for other materials. The next two sentences say that since then its influence has increased in our lives so that in 1976 it was the most widely used material in America. The main points that we can derive from this is that:

Plastic has been used by us for a long time as a major substitute for other materials.

Now look at Paragraph 2. The basic raw materials for making plastic are mentioned here as well as the fact that it can even be made from coal or wood. The materials used are processed into a substance called resin. The main point that we can derive from this is that:

Plastic is made mainly from petroleum and natural gas.

Now look at Paragraph 3. This is fairly long paragraph and contains a number of points. In the outline suggested above, these points have been divided into those which relate to a favourable effect on the environment and those which relate to an unfavourable effect on the environment. Thus the main point of the paragraph is the effect of plastic on the environment, which is further classified into favourable and unfavourable effect.

The favourable effects on the environment are:

- i) Plastic require much less energy to produce than other materials
- ii) There is less smoke and soot in its manufacture
- iii) Other materials like wood also produce toxic gases when burned and non-plastics may catch or start fires more readily.

The unfavourable effects of the use of plastic on the environment are:

- i) The ingredients used in manufacturing plastic are dangerous.
- ii) Common types of plastic produce toxic gases in fires.
- iii) Carbon-reinforced plastics can cause short circuits when burned.

Find the words and ideas that we have left out. Why have we brought in what we have and left out the rest? The major decision was the identification of the main point (stated above) and its classification into

favourable and unfavourable effects. In order to do this you have to get the general sense of the whole passage. The details under favourable and unfavourable effects are less difficult to separate. Under favourable effects, point (i) has been made much briefer and more general. The figures which compare the amount of energy required to produce plastic with that required to produce aluminium and the percentage of consumption of petrol in the production of plastic have not been included in the summary. Since only a general point is required, it is merely stated that plastic requires much less energy to produce than other materials. No other materials than aluminium have been mentioned, but the passage suggests that, comparatively speaking, the amount of energy required to produce plastic is very limited.

Point (ii) presents what occurs in brackets in the passage. What occurs outside the brackets, namely, 'manufacturing process presents a much cleaner face than a steel mill' is less specific than 'less smoke and soot', so the former is not used in the summary. Point (iii) is taken from lower down in the paragraph. It is classified as a favourable effect because it states that plastics don't catch fire as easily as non-plastics.

The writer does admit that there are some unfavourable effects of the use of plastics. Point (i) under this states only the general point that the ingredients used in the manufacture of plastic are dangerous. It is not necessary to bring in all the examples that are given, when writing a summary. Again, in point (ii) it is not necessary to mention the names of the gases that are released. In point (iii) also, the details about the fact that plastics can 'release clouds of tiny fibres that can get into electrical equipment' are not necessary in a summary.

Now look at Paragraph 4. It states that many plastics cannot be broken down by bacteria and reabsorbed by the earth; nor can they be used again to create other things from waste plastic. Because of this the alarmingly large quantity of waste products which cannot be disposed of by means of reabsorption into the soil is growing. Attempts are being made to make recycling more practical. The main point of Paragraph 4 then is that:

Plastics are not biodegradable or recyclable. Thus they add to the earth's already enormous litter problem. Attempts to make recycling easier are being made.

The details about the last sentence above have been omitted because they are not essential.

Next, look at Paragraph 5. This talks about the future of plastic in the world. It is felt that it might be possible to have plastic houses, bridges, or even domes to cover an entire town. It appears that whether we like to have so much plastic or not, its use is going to increase. It is not possible to avoid this. The main point of Paragraph 5 then, is:

The use of plastic in the future is likely to increase greatly. In fact we may even make houses and bridges out of plastic.

Notice that we have brought the example of houses and bridges into the statement of the main point. This is because it is such a striking and strange idea that it requires to be mentioned in order to explain the extent to which plastic will enter our lives.

Now take the outline you prepared earlier and write it out again, filling in all the points now dealt with.

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Now let us see if the summary, as written above in the form of points, makes sense if read on its own, without reference to the original passage. Are all the points properly ordered? That is, does point 2 follow from point 1? Should there be any reordering of points in order that the summary reads more clearly? Is there any repetition? Should the main points of any paragraph be included within the main point arising from another paragraph? Go over the summary carefully to see if any of this is necessary. Put down what you think needs to be done, if at all, in the space given below.

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Perhaps we can include point 4 under point 3 b) because it states one of the undesirable results of plastics. It is misleading to mention it separately. But, if it is moved under another major point, it may have to be phrased in a slightly different way. This is how we could write it:

- 3 b) iv) Plastics are not biodegradable or recyclable. Thus they add to the earth's already enormous litter problem. (Attempts to make recycling easier are being made.)

The last line is put into brackets because it does not strictly fall under unfavourable effects. In fact, it suggests a way of making it less unfavourable in its effect. It, however requires to be stated here because there is no other readily available place for it.

In order to be certain that each point is put in its proper place in the summary, let us give each point a heading. By doing this we shall be able to find out its exact function in the summary. The first point can be considered as a statement of the history of plastic, even though this is done very briefly. So, above point 1, we can write: 'History'. The second point deals with the process of manufacture of plastic. Again, there are no details, but we are told about the ingredients that are used. So, an appropriate heading can be: 'Manufacture: Ingredients'. The third point already has a heading. This can be retained as the heading or a briefer heading can be given, such as: 'Effects on environment: favourable and unfavourable'. The fourth point has now been included in the third, so the fifth point now becomes the fourth. Since this deals with the use of plastic in the future, it can be called: 'Future'.

Now we shall write these headings in the order of occurrence to see if together they form a complete and coherent summary. We shall also give it a title: **Plastic**.

1. History
2. Manufacture: Ingredients
3. Effects on environment: favourable and unfavourable
4. Future.

You can write a very good summary if you put these headings above the main points identified earlier. That will be sufficient for a summary if it is to be written in the form of points. (The full outline type summary is given in the Appendix at the end of the unit).

Compare it with the summary with headings that you have written. You can, however, also write the summary as one paragraph. How will you do this? In the space given below, write out the main points in one paragraph.

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.....

Now compare what you have written with what is given below:

Summary II : Continuous Prose

Plastic

Plastic has been used by us for a long time as a major substitute for other materials. It is made mainly from petroleum and natural gas. It can affect the environment enormously, favourably and unfavourably. The favourable effects can be stated first. They are: (i) plastic requires much less energy to produce than other materials; (ii) there is less smoke and soot in its manufacture; (iii) other materials like wood also create toxic gases when burned, and non-plastics may catch or start fires more readily. It also has effects which are unfavourable to the environment. These are; (i) the ingredients used in manufacturing plastic are dangerous; (ii) common types of plastic produce toxic gases in fires; (iii) carbon-reinforced plastics can cause short circuits when burned; (iv) plastics are not biodegradable or recyclable. Thus they add to the earth's already enormous litter problem, but attempts are being made to make recycling of plastics easier. It is felt that, whether we like it or not, the use of plastic in the future is likely to increase greatly. In fact, we may even make houses and bridges out of plastic.

You will have noticed that the two summaries, the first one written in point form and the second written as a paragraph, have much in common. Most of the sentences of the second summary have been taken over without any change from the first summary. However, some minor changes have been made here and there. Why are these necessary? In a point-form summary, as far as possible the points fall into a pattern and variations in the pattern are not attempted. However, in a paragraph-type summary, it is necessary to vary sentence structures a little, so that it does not become boring to read. The changes introduced above can be understood in this light.

9.4 WRITING A SUMMARY FROM A PARTICULAR POINT OF VIEW

So far we have been concerned with writing a summary of the passage as a whole. But in real life summary writing, we are not very often concerned with being faithful to a particular passage as such. We may instead go to a passage to look for a specific piece of information that we need. If the passage happens to provide the required information we may then consider noting it down in order to use it later. In such cases we go to a particular passage for a specific purpose, our own purpose. Other people may go to the same passage for a different purpose. So the points that I draw from it may be very different from those that another person does. Let us approach the above passage from a particular point of view. You have been asked to gather information, which can be used to show that the use of plastic is dangerous for our environment. What do you note down? Write down your points in the space given below:

You will have realised that a summary of this kind does not require points from the whole passage, but only from the relevant parts. You may also want much greater detail about these parts. So the information will be both less than, and more than in the previous summary. Will it then be sufficient for us to note down all and only the unfavourable effects on the environment in greater detail, or will it be wise to take down the arguments for the use of plastic as well? The ‘favourable’ points may prove to be useful to us in anticipating objections from our opponents. Let us now note down these points.

Summary III: Particular Purpose

Plastic

A. Against plastic:

1. (While it is true that the basic resin-manufacturing process of making plastic produces much less smoke and soot than is produced in the manufacture of steel) nevertheless, many of the ingredients used are dangerous. e.g., benzene (used in the production of styrene, epoxy, polyester and nylon) is a carcinogen.
 2. Common types of plastic produce toxic gases in fires (e.g. hydrogen cyanide, hydrogen chloride). However, it is claimed that wood also produces toxic gases when burned.
 3. Carbon-reinforced plastics when burned release clouds of tiny fibres that can get into electrical equipment and cause short circuits.
 4. Plastics are neither biodegradable nor can they be easily recycled. Thus they add to the earth's already enormous litter problem. Recycling plastic bottles does not have much economic incentive. (However manufacturers are working to make recycling more practical).

B. For Plastic:

It is claimed by plastic manufacturers that:

1. Plastic requires much less energy to produce than other materials.
2. There is less smoke and soot in its manufacture.
3. Other materials like wood also create toxic gases when burned, and non-plastics may catch or start fires more readily.

Now rewrite the points given above into continuous prose so that the passage reads coherently.

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.....

9.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have introduced you to the art of summary writing by giving you practice in

- identifying essential ideas in a passage, and separating them from non-essential ones
- observing how the ideas in a passage are linked to each other.
- deleting non-essential information, words and phrases.

We have also showed you how to arrange the main points in a summary and link the various sentences in it with the use of connectives.

Finally, we have discussed summary writing taking into account a particular point of view.

9.6 KEY WORDS

condense: express in fewer words

crucial: extremely important

environment: surroundings

subject: about which something is said; 'subject' and 'predicate' are the essential parts of a sentence.

subordinate: a clause serving as a noun, an adjective or an adverb is dependent on the main clause for its meaning.

clause summary: a brief account

systematically: methodically.

9.7 APPENDIX

Plastic

1. **History:** Plastic has been used by us for a long time as a major material.
2. **Manufacture: ingredients:** Plastic is mainly made from petroleum and natural gas.
3. **Effects on environment:** favourable and unfavourable:
 - a) The favourable effects of the use of plastic are:
 - i) Plastic requires much less energy to produce than other materials

- ii) There is less smoke and soot in its manufacture.
 - iii) Other materials like wood also create toxic gases when burned, and non-plastics may catch or start fires more readily
- b) The unfavourable effects on the environment are:
- i) The ingredients used in manufacturing plastic are dangerous.
 - ii) Common types of plastic produce toxic gases in fires.
 - iii) Carbon reinforced plastics can cause short circuits when burned.
 - iv) Plastics are not biodegradable or recyclable. Thus they add to the earth's already enormous litter problem. (Attempts to make recycling easier are being made.)
4. **Future:** The use of plastic in the future is likely to increase greatly. In fact we may even make houses and bridges out of plastic.