Precis Writing – Reading Material

**Overview:**

The word précis is derived from French that means summary and précis writing means the art of summarizing. Précis writing is one of the most useful skills you can acquire for your work both as a student and as a professional. Précis writing involves summarizing a document to extract the maximum amount of information, then conveying this information to a reader in minimum words.

**Objectives:**

This reading material is designed to help you:

* Develop Inquisitive, attentive reading
* Develop concise writing skills
* Develop reading strategies and critical thinking

**Introduction**

A good précis shows the writing skills of a person. It must have the following qualities.

**1. Clarity**

Clarity means getting your message across so that the receiver can understand what the writer is trying to convey. It is the basic and essential need of a précis. The ideas should be clear and understandable. There should not be any ambiguity in your writing. The writer can achieve clarity by using simple language and simple structure. If your précis is not understandable to the reader it will lose its importance and meanings for the reader.

**2. Correctness**

Mistakes in your writings always irritate the reader. Of course mistakes are never intentional; even so there is no excuse for them. At the time of writing or composing a précis the writer must ensure that the facts and figures are correct. Structure of sentences and spellings of words must be correct because a single mistake in structure and spelling may spoil the message. We may consider the mistakes under the following headings:

* Misspelled words
* Mistakes in figures and dates
* Mistakes in punctuation
* Mistakes of grammar and structure

**3. Objectivity**

Objectivity means the ability to present or view facts uncolored by feelings, opinions and personal bias. While making a précis, the writer should adopt an objective approach. He should not give and add his personal opinion and ideas in a précis. A précis should be purely a summary of the original text without any addition.

**4. Coherence**

Coherence means the logical and clear interconnection of ideas in a written piece of work. A good précis should be coherent. The ideas which are presented in a précis must have a logical connection and they all should be interrelated. In short we may say that the ideas should be well knitted so that the writer may not be confused and lose his interest.

**5. Completeness**Another striking feature of a good précis is completeness. A précis should be complete in all respects. Completeness means that the writer should include all the important facts in a précis. To make it short he should not omit the important ideas. This mistake on the part of the writer will spoil the importance and meaning of the précis.

**6. Conciseness**

Conciseness is a desirable quality of a good précis. Conciseness means to say all that needs to be said and no more. The writer should write what is necessary and avoid writing unnecessary details. A concise piece of work conveys the message in the fewest possible words. But one point must be kept in mind that the writer should not omit some basic and essential facts to achieve conciseness. To achieve conciseness, notice the following suggestions:

* Omitting unnecessary details
* Eliminate wordy expressions
* Include only relevant material
* Avoid unnecessary repetition

**RULES OF MAKING A PRÉCIS**

A well written précis should be a serviceable substitute for the original work. The goal of a précis is to preserve the core essence of the work in a manner that is both clear and concise. While writing a précis, the writer should follow the below given rules to make it an effective piece of work.

**Read Carefully**

First read the passage twice or thrice carefully to summarize it. This will enable you to understand the main theme of the passage.

**Underlining**

Underline and mark the important ideas and essential points from the original text.

**Outline**

With the help of underlined ideas, draw the outline of your précis.

**Omission**

Omit all the unnecessary information or the long phrases which could be replaced by one word. All the adjectives and the adverbs can also be omitted in order to make a good précis.

**Don’t Omit**

While making a précis, the writer should never omit the important points and ideas which are essential to be described.

**Size**

Keep the fact in your mind that the length of the précis should be the one third of the original passage.

**Indirect Speech**

A précis should be written in indirect speech. If there is direct speech in the passage, it should be changed into indirect speech.

**Tense and Person**

It should be written in the third person and past tense. In the case of universal truth the present tense should be used.

**Own Words**

A précis should be written in your own words and the writer should abstain from borrowing words from the original passage.

**Précis of a Dialogue**

The précis of a dialogue or conversation should always be expressed in form of narrative.

**Objective Approach**

A précis writer should adopt an objective approach. He should not add his personal ideas to a précis. Put all the important points and ideas in a logical order.

**One Paragraph**

There could be two or more paragraphs in the original text. While making the précis, try to write all the ideas in one paragraph.

**Rough Draft**

After omitting all the unnecessary ideas, the writer should prepare a rough draft to finalize it.

**Final Draft**

Having read the rough draft and pointed out some mistakes which may be found in the rough draft, the writer can prepare the final draft.

**Use of Language in Precis Writing**

Here are ten ways to produce more vivid, direct, concise prose by replacing wordy phrases with fewer words and reorganizing sentences. It is not advisable to employ these strategies indiscriminately, but prose will usually be improved by following the recommendations below.

**1. Use Active Voice**

When a sentence includes be or any other copulative verb, such as is or are, recast the sentence to omit the verb.

Before: “The meeting was seen by us as a ploy to delay the project.”

After: “We saw the meeting as a ploy to delay the project.”

**2. Avoid Vague Nouns**

Phrases formed around general nouns such as aspect, degree, and situation clutter sentences.

Before: “She is an expert in the area of international relations.”

After: “She is an expert in international relations.”

**3. Use Words, Not Their Definitions**

Replace explanatory phrases with a single word that encapsulates that explanation.

Before: “The crops also needed to be marketable so that families would be able to sell any yields that exceeded what they personally required.”

After: “The crops also needed to be marketable so that families would be able to sell any surplus.”

**4. Avoid Noun Strings**

Reorganize sentences to eliminate series of nouns used as adjectives.

Before: “The lack of a secure transfer may hamper computer security incident response efforts.”

After: “The lack of a secure transfer may hamper responses to computer-security incidents.”

**5. Convert Nouns to Verbs**

When a sentence includes a noun ending in -tion, change the noun to a verb to simplify the sentence.

Before: “They will collaborate in the creation of new guidelines.”

After: “They will collaborate to create new guidelines.”

**6. Reduce Verb Phrases to Simple Verbs**

Identify the verb buried in a verb phrase and omit the rest of the phrase.

Before: “The results are suggestive of the fact that tampering has occurred.”

After: “The results suggest that tampering has occurred.”

**7. Replace Complex Words with Simple Ones**

Choose simpler synonyms for multisyllabic words.

Before: “The department will disseminate the forms soon.”

After: “The department will pass out the forms soon.”

**8. Avoid Expletives**

Don’t start sentences with “There is,” “There are,” or “It is.”

Before: “There are many factors in the product’s failure.”

After: “Many factors contributed to the product’s failure.”

**9. Eliminate Prepositional Phrases**

Replace “(noun1) of the (noun2)” phrasing with “(noun2)’s (noun1)” phrasing.

Before: “The decision of the committee is final.”

After: “The committee’s decision is final.”

**10. Reduce Wordy Phrases to Single Words**

Replace phrases that signal a transition with simple conjunctions, verbs, or other linking words.

Before: Due to the fact that the project is behind schedule, today’s meeting has been postponed.

After: Because the project is behind schedule, today’s meeting has been postponed.

**Examples:**

**SAMPLE -1**   
One of our most difficult problems is what we call discipline and it is really very complex. You see, society feels that it must control or discipline the citizen, shape his mind according to certain religious, social, moral and economic patterns.  
  
Now, is discipline necessary at all? Please listen carefully. Don’t immediately say YES or NO. Most of us feel, especially while we are young, that there should be no discipline, that we should be allowed to do whatever we like and we think that is freedom. But merely to say that we should be free and so on has very little meaning without understanding the whole problem of discipline.  
  
The keen athlete is disciplining himself the whole time, isn't he? His joy in playing games and the very necessity to keep fit makes him go to bed early, refrain from smoking, eat the right food and generally observe the rules of good health. His discipline and punctuality is not an imposition but a natural outcome of his enjoyment of athletics.  
  
  
**SAMPLE - 2**  
There are different types of forests in India. So, the products received from these forests are also several. The following are some of the forest products which are important in the growth and development of industries.  
  
Forest products and the industries based on them:  
  
(i) Timber: Timber from the forest are utilised in building activities, industries and in carpentry workshops. In Andaman Islands, Asia's largest saw mill has been in operation.  
  
(ii) Rubber: Rubber trees are grown in large numbers on the Western Ghats. As a consequence, there are a large number of industries dependent on rubber in the Peninsular India.  
  
(iii) Wood Pulp: Wood pulp is made from the wood of the forests and paper is manufactured from the pulp. Paper mills are large in number in the States of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. In the city of Nepa in Madhya Pradesh, there is a newsprint industry.  
  
(iv) Lac and Wax: Lac and Wax are forest products and they are used in manufacturing paints. Thus a number of industries make use of forest products.  
  
(v) And for the growth of the cottage industries the forests have been responsible in many an instance.  
  
  
**SAMPLE - 3**  
Prevention is better than cure. It is recognized that the only way to get rid of malaria completely is to get rid of the mosquitoes which cause it. Malaria is always associated with damp and marshy land. This is not because the land is damp, but because the static water is the breeding place of the mosquitoes which begin their life as a larva in the water. Malaria does not frequently occur in dry desert countries because mosquitoes cannot breed there. The only way to destroy mosquitoes is to prevent their breeding in static water. This can be done by draining all ponds and pools. And by keeping them covered in the breeding season with a film of kerosene oil which by depriving the larva of air, kills them.

TITLE: DISCIPLINE IS IMPORTANT  
PRECIS: Though discipline seems to be a problem, it is necessary for all. Discipline shapes our mind and regulates our habits. Some want to be free and think that it is not necessary. Discipline and punctuality give enjoyment to athletes.

TITLE: FOREST PRODUCTS  
PRECIS: Many forest products are useful to man. Timber, rubber, Wood pulp, Lac and Wax are some of them. Timber is used for building activities. Rubber is useful for making many things. Wood pulp is used for making paper. Lac and Wax are used in making paints. There are many industries in India which depend on forest products.

TITLE: MOSQUITOES CAUSES MALARIA  
PRECIS: Mosquitoes, which cause Malaria, breed in stagnant water. They cannot breed in dry lands. If we use kerosene, the stagnant water is covered with a layer of kerosene, the larva will die. By doing so, we could prevent the spreading of malaria.