

Unit 5

READING

Politics and the English Language

George Orwell

George Orwell (1903–1950) was born in the British colony of Bengal. His growing dislike of imperialism led him to resign from the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. He spent a few years in poverty, and volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War, before becoming well known for his journalism. He is best remembered for his two great novels, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Orwell is also known for his insights about the political implications of the use of language. In his famous essay ‘Politics and the English Language’, he satirised the meaningless use of clichés, bureaucratic euphemisms, and academic jargon, and explained how these have a negative impact on thought itself. A small portion of the essay is reproduced below.

Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilisation is decadent and our language—so the argument runs—must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step toward political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers. [...]

[T]wo qualities are common to all [bad writing]. The first is staleness of imagery; the other is lack of precision. The writer either has a meaning and cannot express it, or he inadvertently says something else, or he is almost indifferent as to whether his words mean anything or not. This mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially of any kind of political writing. As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house. [...]

I said earlier that the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue, if they produced an argument at all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words and constructions. So far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes, this may be true, but it is not true in detail. Silly words and expressions have often disappeared, not through any evolutionary process but owing to the conscious action of a minority. Two recent examples were *explore every avenue* and *leave no stone unturned*, which were killed by the jeers of a few journalists. [...]

What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way around. In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is surrender to them. When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualising you probably hunt about until you find the exact words that seem to fit it. When you think of something abstract you are more inclined to use words from the start, and unless you make a conscious effort to prevent it, the existing dialect will come rushing in and do the job for you, at the expense of blurring or even changing your meaning. Probably it is better to put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures and sensations. Afterward one can choose—not simply *accept*—the phrases that will best cover the meaning, and then switch round and decide what impressions one's words are likely to make on another person. This last effort of the mind cuts out all stale or mixed images, all prefabricated phrases, needless repetitions, and humbug and vagueness generally. But one can often be in doubt about the effect of a word or a phrase, and one needs rules that one can rely on when instinct fails. I think the following rules will cover most cases:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

These rules sound elementary, and so they are, but they demand a deep change of attitude in anyone who has grown used to writing in the style now fashionable. [...]

I have not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought. Stuart Chase and others have come near to claiming that all abstract words are meaningless, and have used this as a pretext for advocating a kind of political quietism. Since you don't know what Fascism is, how can you struggle against Fascism? One need not swallow such absurdities as this, but one ought to recognise that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end. If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself. Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase—some *jackboot*, *Achilles' heel*, *hotbed*, *melting pot*, *acid test*, *veritable inferno*, or other lump of verbal refuse—into the dustbin where it belongs.

GLOSSARY

<i>decadence</i>	excessive indulgence in pleasure for the sake of pleasure
<i>archaism</i>	a thing that is very old or old fashioned
<i>hansom cabs</i>	carriages driven by horses (used before the advent of cars in Britain)
<i>decline</i>	to become of low quality
<i>reinforcing</i>	strengthening or supporting (something)
<i>intensifying</i>	making (something) more intense
<i>take to drink</i>	to make a habit of drinking large quantities of alcohol
<i>slovenliness</i>	dirtiness; untidiness
<i>regeneration</i>	new growth from old
<i>frivolous</i>	without substance; trivial
<i>staleness</i>	the state of being old, out of date
<i>precision</i>	being exact or accurate
<i>inadvertently</i>	without realising something
<i>indifferent</i>	not particularly interested in something
<i>vagueness</i>	lacking clarity
<i>incompetence</i>	inability to do something correctly or successfully
<i>concrete</i>	existing in material form; specific
<i>abstract</i>	existing as an idea rather than in physical form

<i>hackneyed</i>	overused
<i>tacked onto</i>	attached afterwards
<i>jeers</i>	rude or mocking remarks
<i>dialect</i>	a particular, unique version of a language
<i>prefabricated</i>	manufactured sections that can be used to put something together
<i>humbug</i>	something intended to deceive
<i>barbarous</i>	primitive
<i>elementary</i>	very basic
<i>specimen</i>	an example of its type
<i>advocating</i>	recommending; supporting
<i>political quietism</i>	calm acceptance of things as they are without attempts to resist or change them
<i>fascism</i>	a political system led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, regimenting all industry, commerce, etc., and emphasising an aggressive nationalism (and often racism)
<i>absurdities</i>	things that are unreasonable or wildly ridiculous
<i>decay</i>	to age, crumble, die
<i>follies</i>	mistakes
<i>orthodoxy</i>	rigidly sticking to certain traditions
<i>conservatives</i>	people who are reluctant to accept change and new ideas
<i>Anarchists</i>	people who favour radical change and the abolition of governments
<i>jackboot</i>	a large leather military boot reaching to the knee (used as a symbol of cruel or authoritarian rule)
<i>Achilles' heel</i>	a vulnerable spot
<i>hotbed</i>	an environment promoting the growth of something, especially something unwelcome
<i>melting pot</i>	a place where different peoples, styles and ideas mix together
<i>acid test</i>	a conclusive test of the success or value of something
<i>veritable inferno</i>	a very hot fire
<i>refuse</i>	garbage, waste

COMPREHENSION**A. Choose the right answer from the following options.**

1. What does the author think is curable?
 - a. the decadence of society
 - b. the decadence of language
 - c. the decadence of politics

2. Which of the following should be encouraged, according to the author?
 - a. abstract language
 - b. concrete language
 - c. prefabricated phrases

3. Which of the following rules does the author believe must be followed in order to make the English language better?
 - a. Use common figures of speech to make your meaning clear.
 - b. If it is possible to cut a word out, cut it out.
 - c. Always use the passive voice, unless the active voice is necessary.

4. What does the author describe as 'sentimental archaism'?
 - a. the struggle against communism
 - b. the struggle against the abuse of language
 - c. the struggle against one's own nature

B. Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. The author is happy with the state of the English language today. ()
2. The present political chaos is caused by the decay of language. ()
3. Political language is designed to make truth sound like truth and lies sound like lies. ()
4. Lack of precision characterises the use of language, according to the author. ()

C. Answer the following questions in 50–100 words.

1. Mention three rules the author advocates in order to better one's use of language.
2. What problem does the author have against political language?
3. Mention three expressions that the author wishes would stop being used. Also explain what these expressions mean.
4. Mention two characteristics of modern language usage that the author does not like. Explain why he despises them.

D. Answer the following questions in 200–300 words.

1. What do you think the author means by ‘What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word’?
2. What do you think of the rules the author has given to improve language? Would these help in making language simpler and easier to understand? If so, how?
3. The author says political language is designed to twist meaning. Do you agree with this statement? Use examples from speeches you have heard or read to substantiate your answer.
4. Many people believe that language grows organically, and do not see it as an instrument that can be shaped according to one’s needs. Do you think the author agrees with this view? Justify your answer by using examples from the text.

GRAMMAR

Clichés

A cliché is a remark that has been repeated so often that it has become meaningless. People often use clichés unthinkingly—and hence the use of clichés betrays a lack of originality, sincerity, and effort. Further, the mind of the reader/listener is so used to these expressions that it no longer engages with the images the expressions conjure. Therefore, these phrases are not very effective.

The list of clichés is very long. Here are just a few examples:

all intents and purposes	fact of the matter	new lease of life
all said and done	few and far between	par for the course
baptism by fire	heated debate	paradigm shift
bite the bullet	in this day and age	path of least resistance
choke with emotion	level playing field	stick out like a sore thumb
cutting edge	low hanging fruit	synergise
think outside the box	throw under the bus	when push comes to shove

At the beginning of this unit, you read extracts from an essay by George Orwell where he talks about ‘worn-out and useless phrases’ and ‘staleness of imagery’. He is referring to the overuse of clichés in writing and in speech. His advice to counter this is: ‘Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.’

Now that you have learned what clichés are, and why they are ineffective, try and spot them in your own writing. Rephrase sentences that rely on clichés. Replacing clichés involves thinking about what it really means, and then conveying that meaning in your own words. For example, ‘at this moment in time’ can be re-written more simply as ‘now’.

This leads us to another point about clichés: they are often used to merely add to the length of a piece of writing. Such expressions don't contribute much value to the communication process, and should be cut out.

ACTIVITY

Have a classroom discussion on the most overused phrases and expressions you come across either in the print or the broadcast media (including the internet). Divide the class into groups. Each group should list at least five clichés that have not been mentioned in the list above.

Redundancies

We often tend to write like we think: in a long-winded, rambling, and semi-structured manner. However, this makes for a poor writing style. As mentioned in Unit 3, a good writing style requires clarity in thought and structure. Being concise is another equally important quality a good writer ought to cultivate. Do not waste your reader's time: get to the point, and keep things simple.

Redundancy in writing is the use of words, phrases or sentences that needlessly repeat what has already been said. This unnecessary repetition sometimes distracts or confuses the reader, often makes a passage less interesting, and usually dilutes the impact of the text. Here are a few examples of redundant expressions.

- ✗ Vijaya's cap was *red in colour*.
- ✓ Vijaya's cap was red.

- ✗ Shoaib practised French *on a daily basis*.
- ✓ Shoaib practised French daily.

- ✗ The enemy was *surrounded on all sides*.
- ✓ The enemy was surrounded.

- ✗ The oven is *located in the immediate vicinity of the stove*.
- ✓ The oven is near the stove.

- ✗ *An analysis of the process was performed by Ritika*.
- ✓ Ritika analysed the process.

- ✗ *In the light of the fact that the product is not of a satisfactory nature, the consensus of opinion is that it is incumbent upon us to postpone the launch until later.*
- ✓ Because the product is unsatisfactory, the consensus is that we should postpone the launch.

Redundancies creep into our writing when we ...

- ✗ Use verbose expressions instead of simple words
'notwithstanding the fact that' instead of 'although'
'concerning the matter of' instead of 'about'

- ✗ Use abstract or vague expressions that add no meaning
'we are in a position to begin' instead of 'we can begin'
- ✗ Use intensifiers or modifying words that are not necessary
'absolutely critical' instead of simply 'critical'
'shouted loudly' instead of just 'shouted'
'anonymous stranger', 'true fact', 'future plans'
- ✗ Use nouns in place of verbs
'she made reference to' instead of 'she referred to'
- ✗ Spell out the last word of an abbreviation
ATM machine (the 'M' stands for machine)
PIN number (the 'N' stands for number)

Do not use more words than necessary in a sentence, nor more sentences than necessary in a paragraph. The wordier your writing is, the harder it will be for the reader to understand what you are trying to say. Compare the sentences given below.

- ✗ APJ Abdul Kalam, who served as the eleventh President of the country of India, was in office from the year 2002 to the year 2007.
- ✓ APJ Abdul Kalam served as the eleventh President of India from 2002 to 2007.

The first sentence uses too many words. The second sentence conveys the same meaning in an economical way.

Often, we do not realise that we are saying the same thing twice. Learn to recognise redundant words and phrases, and rid your writing of them. Do not, however, sacrifice clarity for the sake of brevity.

VOCABULARY

Common Abbreviations

Given below is a list of useful abbreviations. While it is not exhaustive, they do contain some common terms related to everyday conversation, writing and the world of business that you need to be aware of. Familiarise yourself with the meanings of these abbreviations.

ABBREVIATION	MEANING
@	at
\$	dollar (the unit of currency in many countries)
£	pound sterling (the unit of currency of the United Kingdom)
a.k.a.	also known as

a.m.	ante meridiem ('before noon')
a/c	account
a/o	account of (or, on behalf of)
AGM	annual general meeting
AOB	any other business
approx.	approximately
ASAP	as soon as possible
ATM	automated teller machine (cash dispenser)
attn	for the attention of
AWOL	absent without official leave
BCE	before common era
c/o	care of (on letters, this means 'at the address of')
cc	copy to
CE	common era
CEO	chief executive officer
CFO	chief financial officer
Co.	company
COD	cash on delivery
dept	department
DIY	do it yourself
DoB	date of birth
e.g.	exempli gratia ('for example')
EGM	extraordinary general meeting
ETA	estimated time of arrival
etc.	et cetera ('and so on')
ETD	estimated time of departure
FAQ	frequently asked questions
FDI	foreign direct investment
FIR	first information report
FYI	for your information
GDP	gross domestic product
GMO	genetically modified organism
GMT	Greenwich mean time (the time in London)
GNP	gross national product

GST	goods and services tax
HR	human resources
i.e.	id est ('that is')
ID	identification
Inc.	incorporated
IOU	I owe you
IPO	initial public offer
IQ	intelligence quotient
Jr	junior
K	thousand
lb	pound (the unit of weight)
Ltd	limited
misc.	miscellaneous
mo.	month / per month / monthly (depending on context)
N/A	not applicable
NB	nota bene ('please note well')
no. / nos.	number / numbers
NRI	non-resident Indian
OBC	other backward class
OHT	overhead transparency (sheet of film on which figures can be drawn and then displayed via an overhead projector)
p.a.	per annum ('every year')
PAN	permanent account number
p.m.	post meridiem ('after noon')
p.p.	per pro (used before signing in a person's absence)
p.s.	post scriptum (a note added to a letter after the signature)
p.w.	per week
PA	personal assistant
PC	personal computer
PFA	please find attached
PLC	public limited company
PR	public relations
PTO	please turn over
qty	quantity
R&D	research and development

RBI	Reserve Bank of India
re.	with reference to / regarding
ROI	return on investment
RSVP	repondez s'il vous plait ('please reply')
s.a.e.	stamped addressed envelope
SWOT	strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
TBA	to be announced
tbsp	tablespoon
tsp	teaspoon
USP	unique selling proposition (what makes a product different from others)
VAT	value added tax
VIP	very important person
viz.	videlicet ('namely')
VP	vice president
w.r.t.	with regard to

WRITING**Writing a Summary**

A summary is a shortened version of a letter, a passage, a report, an article, a chapter, or a book, written in the summariser's own words. The skill of summarising is very useful in both academic and work-related situations. For instance, newspaper reporters will have to summarise political speeches; an office worker may have to summarise reports and the proceedings of official committees and meetings; a research scholar will have to summarise the objectives, proceedings and results of her research.

The use of summaries

- Summaries are useful to people who have no time to read the original text in full. For example, a busy senior executive would find it convenient to read summaries of a document or a series of letters.
- Summaries are of great help in checking if a book or an article is of relevance to someone working on a particular subject. Thus, scholars and scientists use summaries of research reports, articles and books to find out if they want to read the original text.
- A summary is a great study aid for any learner, as one can condense essays, articles or chapters from books for future reference.

The length of summaries

The length of a summary varies, depending on the original text and also the purpose for which it is written.

- If a summary is written only to give the reader an idea of what a book or an article is about, it can be very brief, say about a tenth of the original. Such a summary is called an **abstract**. You read an abstract when you are searching for relevant material on your subject and want to check if it would be useful to read the original text.
- If the condensed version is meant to cover the main points of the original well enough to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the piece without having to read it, then the summary—known as a **précis**—will have to be about a third of the original. You read a précis because you are interested in the original but have no time to read it completely.

The function of both kinds of summaries is to outline what is said in the original passage and not to support or criticise it.

Skills required for writing summaries

- *Firstly*, writing a summary is an exercise in reading and understanding.
- *Secondly*, it involves analysing what is read, selecting important points, and using note-making skills.
- *Finally*, it calls for the ability to rewrite the original passage clearly and briefly in your own words.

Writing a summary

- Writing a summary should start with a careful reading of the text. This may be followed, if necessary, by a second reading (especially when the passage is either very complex or packed with ideas and difficult to understand).
- The next step is to identify the subject of the passage and the main points and the subpoints coming under it. Write these down in numbered note form. Check the original text again to see whether you have left out any important point.
- Use your notes to write a draft of the summary in your own words. Go through your draft and check every sentence to see if it has words that can be omitted, or if an alternative structure can be used.
- Make necessary changes: cut out repetitions, simplify complex expressions, and correct any mistakes you may have made.
- Make sure that the first draft matches the recommended length of the kind of summary you have to write. If you find that the draft of your summary exceeds the prescribed word limit, condense it further either by (1) omitting minor details that are not essential for an understanding of the ideas contained in the original text, or by (2) making its sentences shorter, simpler and more concise.
- One way of reducing the length of a text is by replacing phrases consisting of more than one word with a single word. Look at the sentences on the next page. They contain expressions that can be replaced by one word.

They welcomed the person they did not know.

They welcomed the stranger.

Working with others to achieve something all of you want is the best way of ensuring success.
Cooperation is the best way of ensuring success.

Her handwriting could not be read.

Her handwriting was illegible.

He is able to do things by himself, without the help or advice of others.

He is independent.

- Another way of reducing the length of a sentence is to change its structure. Compound and complex sentences, for example, can be turned into simple sentences. Look at the sentences below. These sentences can be made shorter by changing their structure.

The fact that he is both honest and intelligent is something that everyone appreciates.

Everyone appreciates his intelligence and honesty.

The first prize was won by the boy with long hair.

The long-haired boy won the first prize.

We saw a train that was approaching and got up from the platform bench.

Seeing an approaching train, we got up from the platform bench.

- Finally, make a neat, fair copy of your summary.

Points to remember

- Write the summary in your own words, making sure that you have covered all the main points of the original.
- Do not add any detail or comment not found in the original.
- The organisation of the summary should match that of the original by following the order and the importance given to the main points and the sub-points.
- The summary should have the same tone as the original, and should not reflect your attitude towards the subject.
- Make use of connectives and linking words, such as 'firstly' and 'however', to make your summary coherent.
- Examples can be omitted—except where they are required by the context or help the reader to understand a point better (in which case, limit them to just one or two).
- Sentences in direct speech can be omitted or, when essential, be changed to indirect speech.
- Quotations, tables and diagrams included in the original are omitted.
- The language of a summary should be free from slang and colloquial expressions. It must be simple, concise and direct.
- Avoid using idiomatic phrases or fixed expressions.

Model summary

Read the passage below and carefully note the steps taken to summarise it.

There is an enemy beneath our feet—an enemy the more deadly for its complete impartiality. It recognises no national boundaries, no political parties. Everyone in the world is threatened by it. The enemy is the earth itself. When an earthquake strikes, the world trembles. The power of a quake is greater than anything human beings themselves 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 sometime in the near future people will have discovered a means of protecting themselves.

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. Whole 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 valleys.

Consider the terrifying statistics from the past. Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, was destroyed entirely and 450 people were killed in 1755. In Peru, 50,000 people died in an earthquake in 1970. 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 eighty feet farther west into the Pacific Ocean. Imagine the power of something that can move an entire subcontinent!

This is the problem that faces scientists. They are dealing with forces so immense that human beings 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.

(340 words)

The first step is to read through the passage to find its theme, or what the writer is talking about. The theme, or topic, will be the title of your summary.

Next, see how the theme is developed and write down the main points in the form of numbered notes of the following kind:

Terror from earthquakes

- A. earthquake—the great enemy
- B. damage done by earthquakes—general
- C. damage done by earthquakes—particular instances
- D. task before scientists

Fill out this bare frame with important details to get a fuller outline.

Terror from earthquakes

- A. earthquake—the great enemy
 - 1. strikes everywhere
 - 2. very great power
- B. damage done by earthquakes—general
 - 1. in a city
 - a. gas mains burst
 - b. explosions and fires
 - c. underground
 - d. buildings collapse
 - e. bridges and dams fall
 - f. crevices on streets
 - g. railways wrecked
 - 2. in the sea—huge tidal waves
 - 3. mountain regions—avalanches
- C. damage done by earthquakes—particular instances
 - 1. Lisbon—1755
 - a. city destroyed
 - b. 450 killed
 - 2. Peru—1970: 50,000 killed
 - 3. Alaska—1968
 - a. only a few killed
 - b. entire subcontinent shifted 80 feet into ocean
- D. task before scientists
 - 1. difficult to deal with irresistible forces; can only work
 - a. to pinpoint earthquake-prone areas
 - b. to help people take precautionary measures

Let us use the notes above to write the first draft of the summary, which could be as follows:

The earth itself becomes our enemy when an earthquake strikes. Every country in the world is threatened by the tremendous fury of earthquakes. Their power exceeds all the forces released by humankind. When a city is hit, buildings fall and explosions and fires are started. Underground railways are wrecked. Gaping crevices appear on streets. Bridges and dams fall. Huge tidal waves rise in the sea. Avalanches roar down

the mountainsides. An earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 destroyed the city and killed 450 persons. In Peru, 50,000 people died in an earthquake in 1970. The subcontinent of Alaska was pushed 80 feet into the sea in 1968. Faced with such tremendous forces, which cannot be resisted, scientists can only pinpoint earthquake-prone areas and take suitable steps to minimise the harm.

(129 words)

This first draft can be condensed further by omitting more details and by pruning the language used. Here is the second draft.

Earthquakes, whose destructive power exceeds all the forces created by humankind, threaten every country in the world. When a city is hit, buildings fall and explosions and fires are started. Underground railways are wrecked. Wide crevices appear on streets. Bridges and dams fall. Huge tidal waves rise in the sea and avalanches roar down mountainsides. An earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 destroyed the city and killed many. In Peru, 50,000 people were killed in 1970. The subcontinent of Alaska was pushed 80 feet into the sea in 1968. Faced with such irresistible forces, scientists can only pinpoint earthquake-prone areas and take steps to minimise the harm.

(106 words)

The summary above would be a précis. Now see how you can condense it further to draft an abstract.

Earthquakes, which strike every part of the earth, possess such great power that they cause extensive damage. Buildings, bridges and railways are wrecked, and explosions and fires are caused, as are dangerous avalanches on mountainsides and huge tidal waves. Earthquakes caused death and destruction in Lisbon (1755) and in Peru (1970). An earthquake shifted the subcontinent of Alaska eighty feet into the sea. Scientists cannot stop earthquakes but they can warn people by pinpointing earthquake-prone areas.

(76 words)

The first draft of the abstract is still too long and can be condensed further.

Earthquakes strike everywhere and cause extensive damage by their great power. Destruction to buildings and other structures, avalanches, huge tidal waves and even shifting of land masses can result from earthquakes. Scientists cannot stop earthquakes but can pinpoint earthquake-prone areas and alert people.

(43 words)

Exercise

As with all writing skills, the only way to develop the skill of summary writing is through practise, practise, and more practise. Your teacher will give you passages in class: condense the passages as demonstrated above.

LIFE SKILLS**Motivation**

Very often we begin something with a lot of enthusiasm, but we lose our sense of purpose and direction along the way, and end up leaving things incomplete or poorly done. Motivation is that which propels us towards a goal. It is the reason why we do something, and, indeed, do it well. It is therefore very important to keep oneself motivated.

How does one become motivated—or, more importantly, *stay* motivated through the course of something? Choose goals, tasks, projects, and occupations that interest you, that you are passionate about. If you are interested in your job, in your field, in your goal, then you will do whatever it takes to be excellent at it. You won't think twice about putting in extra effort and longer hours, or about making necessary sacrifices, if you love what you do. Break up larger goals or tasks into smaller ones. Track your progress, and celebrate each milestone. All this will feed your desire to achieve your goal, and thus keep you motivated.

What if a goal or a task has been thrust upon you, and is not of your choosing? If you can find even one thing about your situation in life, be it at the workplace or at home, to be excited about, then you will find dealing with that situation easier and you will be able to execute necessary tasks to the best of your abilities. Connect the goal or task to something that has meaning for you, something that is relevant to your personal goals or ideals. This will help you stay motivated.

Remember that failures (even repeated failures and setbacks) are inevitable. View setbacks, obstacles and failures as opportunities that teach you how to progress in a better manner. This kind of a positive attitude is essential to motivation.

The following article, which appeared in *The Hindu* in January 2016, is about a woman whose passion for her field motivated her to leave an enduring legacy for others—which in turn now motivates them.

The Dancer with a White Parasol

Ranjana Dave

When dancers look back at their lives, they often remark that they were born to dance. Mrinalini Sarabhai, who passed away in Ahmedabad on Thursday at the age of 97, took that conviction a step further. At a young age, she already knew she was a dancer, as opposed to wanting to become one. Her life was a celebration of this belief.

Though primarily identified as a dancer, Mrinalini brought to her work an acute social and political consciousness, uncommon for the times she lived in. This awareness was home-grown—her mother, Ammu Swaminathan, was a freedom fighter and later a member of India's first Parliament. Her sister, Lakshmi Sahgal, was part of the Indian National Army.

Sarabhai was born in Kerala, spending her early years in Switzerland. In school, she was introduced to Dalcroze Eurhythmics, a system of introducing musical concepts through movement. She spent time studying acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. On returning to India, she enrolled at Santiniketan where she was profoundly influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and singled him out as her only real guru.

Like many other dancers of her generation, Sarabhai trained in multiple dance styles. She learned Manipuri with Amubi Singh and Kathakali with Kunju Kurup. She also caught the attention of dancer Ram Gopal, who went on to cast her in some of his productions. Further, she studied Bharatanatyam with Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and Muthukumar Pillai.

She met the celebrated scientist Vikram Sarabhai, who is known as the architect of India's space programme, in Bangalore. They got married in 1942 and moved to his home in Ahmedabad. There, Mrinalini had to counter the notion that being a performer was not an acceptable career choice for 'respectable women'.

Living in post-Independence India, there was much to rejoice about. Yet, Mrinalini was also disturbed by the inequality she saw around her. Very early on, she brought social issues into her choreographic practice. 'I was looking for subjects that would shake people in dance,' she once said in a documentary.

For instance, 'Memory is a Ragged Fragment of Eternity' (1960s) was triggered by the high suicide rate of women in India. It starts with an exuberant dance by three women celebrating their womanhood and their existence. It then segues into the story of one woman, taking us on a journey through her life. It masterfully eludes the literal in its depiction of the censure that drives this woman to the brink of suicide.

Dancing in a diagonal coming downstage, two dancers use the sharp lines of a simple Bharatanatyam *adavu* (step) to express their suspicion and resentment towards her. Thrown at the protagonist, the *mudras* (gestures) have the potency of poisoned arrows. The costume reinforces the message, bringing the piece closer home. While the vocabulary is drawn from Bharatanatyam, the dancers are clad in colourful textiles from Gujarat, wearing chunky silver instead of the detailed temple jewellery of Tamil Nadu.

Mrinalini was more inclined to performing, and was reluctant to teach. However, she realised in her new city that if she wanted more people to dance, she would have to train them. This laid the foundation for the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, which was set up in 1948. It went on to grow into a centre for progressive arts in Ahmedabad, training thousands of students in dance, drama, music and puppetry over 68 years. Documentaries on Mrinalini's life show her walking into Darpana, her back erect, with a pristine white parasol in her hand. She was at the

centre of its rich, chaotic activity. Even in her later years, she actively taught, mentored and created new work for her students.

Mrinalini's dance legacy is now in its third generation. She is survived by her daughter, Mallika, a dancer and political activist. Her grandson Revanta is an emerging choreographer, with roots in classical and contemporary dance forms, while her granddaughter Anahita pursues various interests in dance and choreography.

'Middle-class' women who, sheltered by the relative safety of marriage, created careers in classical dance, are both admired for the institutions they created and criticised for the conventional choices they made. Mrinalini Sarabhai is one of them. What matters most is not the institutions she gave birth to, or the dancers she trained. It is the image that she passed on to her students—that of the woman with a white parasol who danced every day, as long as she could, because she loved it.

GLOSSARY

<i>conviction</i>	firmly held belief or opinion
<i>acute</i>	highly developed
<i>single out</i>	to pick one thing or person out of many and pay close attention to it
<i>notion</i>	idea; belief
<i>choreographic practice</i>	here, the method and ideas involved in creating new dance pieces
<i>triggered</i>	caused by
<i>exuberant</i>	full of energy and enthusiasm
<i>segue</i>	to move uninterruptedly from one thing to another
<i>elude</i>	to escape
<i>censure</i>	to criticise
<i>resentment</i>	unhappiness at being treated unfairly
<i>protagonist</i>	the main character
<i>potency</i>	having a lot of power
<i>erect</i>	straight
<i>pristine</i>	pure
<i>parasol</i>	umbrella
<i>chaotic</i>	in a state of confusion and disorder
<i>mentor</i>	to advise and train
<i>legacy</i>	something valuable that is handed down from one person to another

ACTIVITIES**Individual activity**

Write a 300-word essay on each of the following topics.

- What inspires and motivates you?
- Is there any person in your life who has motivated you to achieve something? In what way did she/he motivate you? (You may write about more than one person, if you wish.)

Pair activity

- Choose a partner. Now find two things about the other person that motivates you to either do something or change the way you are to become better at something. Your partner will also do the same.
- Exchange notes with each other. Explain to the other person what you find motivational about them.

WRITING ACTIVITY