

# PRECIS WRITING

*Precis* (pray-see, pl. pray-seez) writing is a basic and very useful skill. It has been variously referred to as 'abbreviation', 'subtraction', 'abstract', 'summary', and 'condensation'. The French gave it the name 'precis' — the pruning away of all that is inessential.

## Definition:

"A precis is a brief, original summary of the important ideas given in a long selection. Its aim is to give the general effect created by the original selection." It is a concise and lucid summary that forsakes all unnecessary details (including illustrations, amplifications, and embellishments) in favor of reproducing the logic, development, organization and emphasis of the original. Retaining the substance of a fuller statement, it seeks to articulate another authors thoughts by extracting the maximum amount of information and carefully conveying it in a minimum number of words.

## The Purpose:

Precis writing aims at intelligent reading and clear, accurate writing. It is a skill of both analysis and genesis that critically questions every thought included and excluded, each word used to express those thoughts, and the proportions and arrangements of those thoughts — both in the original and in the precis. In its exaction it mercilessly reveals an author's wordiness and looseness or thinness of thought and construction. It should strengthen our style, our sense of proportion and emphasis, and our sensitivity to word meanings and an author's viewpoint,

## Guide to a Successful Precis:

1. Understand the essential facts or dominating idea of the passage.
2. In your opening sentence express what the passage tends to show.
3. With as few sentences as possible enlarge on the essential shown in the opening sentence.
4. Summarize only what the author says; do not add your own opinions.
5. As far as possible, use your own words.
6. Ask whether the precis is clear to one who has not seen the original.

A precis is usually **reduced to at least one-fourth of its original length** and frequently much more. How long it is will be determined by its purpose and by the nature of the original.

## PRELIMINARY TO PRECIS WRITING:

1. An **abstract** is a condensation of a passage, the important words, phrases, and sentences containing the essential thoughts being worked as simply as possible into sentences. It simply requires the ability to pick out essential facts. Exercises in abstracting will involve underscoring the essential facts in a passage and combining them into a single whole. (N.b.: Here 'abstract' is used in its narrow sense to mean a digest or running summary.)

2. A **paraphrase** is a restatement of a difficult passage, stating clearly and fully in language of the simplest sort just what the passage means. Because it clarifies hidden meanings and obscure passages, it is usually longer than the original." Precis writing involves the ability to paraphrase, but adds to it concision, all the while being careful to not to lose or distort the original meaning Exercising in paraphrasing might involve transposing poetry to prose, explaining the meaning of proverbs, etc.

3. In precis writing it is necessary to say as much as possible in as few words as possible." A word may substitute for a phrase and a phrase for a clause. The concern is for the **precise meaning** or connotation of a **word**.

4. The proper use of the colon and semicolon in **punctuation** is an aid to good precis writing.

5. Generally a precis should be written in **reported or indirect speech**. This means a precis will be in third person, in the past tense. Exercises will involve the change of direct speech to indirect speech.

6. A **precis title** must be cold and matter of fact, not attractive to the imaginative mind. It is a precis of the precis.

## Ask of your precis:

1. Are the opening sentences brief and to the point? Which is best?
2. Which opening sentence tends to show best what the passage expresses?
3. Do the sentence following the opening sentence amplify the essentials shown in the opening sentence?
4. Which precis clarifies the author's best thoughts? Have additional thoughts been added?
5. Is the precis clear to one who has not seen the original?

**METHOD:**

“It will be well to remember the object of precis writing: a brief and clear summary — or precis — of what you have first carefully read. No words, phrases, clauses, or sentences which are unessential to the thought of the selection, are considered. Every unnecessary word is discarded until all that you have left is the thought, the dominating idea, of what you have read. Then in your own words, give this thought as briefly and clearly as possible. Your sentences must be carefully constructed. Do not omit any essential articles, prepositions, or conjunctions.”

**First Reading:**

1. Read every word slowly and carefully until you clearly understand the sense of the passage.
2. Look up all unfamiliar words, phrases, and allusions
3. Identify the dominating idea, the essential thought, of the passage. Ask if this idea were omitted, would the fundamental meaning of the passage be changed?
4. Determine what emphasis and space to give the thought in each section; write a heading for each section.

**Second Reading:**

1. Underscore with a pencil the important facts containing the essential thoughts. This is a process of differentiation between what is essential and what is not. Generally you will omit examples, illustrations, conversations, and repetitions.
2. Reread your selections to see that they are wise and adequate.
3. Determine if your underscoring expresses the main ideas.

**Final Reading:**

Rapidly and intensely reread the origin, dwelling on the important facts selected for a precis.

**First Copy:**

1. Close the book/original.
2. Write a summary of the thoughts as you remember them.
3. Compare with the original and correct, asking:

Did you retain the logical order and development of these thoughts?

Did you emphasize the dominant thought or erroneously emphasize a minor thought?

Did you omit any necessary facts? names? dates? places?

Is your precis clear to one who has not seen the original?

Are your sentences clear and well-constructed?

Did you use third person and the past tense?

Did you punctuate and spell correctly?

Did you make any grammatical or rhetorical errors?

**Final Copy:**

1. Read your first copy through carefully.
2. Condense wherever you can, substituting single words for phrases and phrases for longer clauses.
3. Use only simple figures of speech.
4. Clearly and concisely express the essential points.
5. Reduce verbiage while still making the point and retaining some of the flavor and spirit of the original.
6. Be fair to the sentiments expressed, even if you don't agree with them.
7. Rewrite neatly.

**References:**

Paul W. Lehmann's "The Junior Precis Practice Pad"

Robert M. Gay's "Writing Through Reading,"

(material abstracted from [http://www.classicalco-op.com/co\\_op\\_new/ce\\_tiki/tiki-index.php?page=Precis%20Writing](http://www.classicalco-op.com/co_op_new/ce_tiki/tiki-index.php?page=Precis%20Writing))

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.

### **IMPORTANT POINTS-**

- There are different types of forests.
- The products are several.
- Forest products develop industries.
- Timber is used in building activities.
- Rubber trees are grown in large quantities on the Western Ghats.
- In peninsular India there are many industries which depend on rubber.
- Wood pulp is made from the trees of the forests and is useful for making paper.
- There are paper mills in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and in many states.
- There is a newsprint industry in Nepa.
- Lac and wax are used in making paints.
- The forests are responsible for the growth of cottage industries.

### **FAIR DRAFT-**

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.

# PRECISE WRITING SAMPLES

## **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.

## **ROUGH DRAFT-**

Discipline is one of the biggest problems in the world. Society feels that discipline should be controlled to shape the mind of the citizen. Some want to be free to think and do whatever they like. Even the keen athlete is disciplining himself the whole time. He observes the rules of good health.

## **FAIR DRAFT-**

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 as well.

## **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

# PUNCTUATION TEST

Please note that the following quiz is only for self-analysis.

1. Choose the correct sentence.

- A: I am asking if you would like to rollerblade together tomorrow?
- B: I am asking "if you would like to rollerblade together tomorrow"?
- C: I am asking if you would like to rollerblade together tomorrow.
- D: I am asking "if you would like to rollerblade together tomorrow."

2. Choose the correct sentence.

- A: Yes, Jean, you were right about that answer.
- B: Yes Jean, you were right about that answer.
- C: Yes Jean you were right about that answer.
- D: Yes, Jean, you were right, about that answer.

3. Choose the correct sentence.

- A: I read in a book, "If all else fails, succeed; if all else succeeds"...
- B: I read in a book, "If all else fails, succeed; if all else succeeds..."
- C: I read in a book, "If all else fails, succeed; if all else succeeds...."
- D: I read in a book, "If all else fails; succeed; if all else succeeds..."

4. Choose the correct sentence.

- A: Wherever we go, "people" recognize us.
- B: Wherever we go people recognize us.
- C: Wherever we go; people recognize us.
- D: Wherever we go, people recognize us.

5. Choose the correct sentence.

- A: Whenever, Cheryl, is in town she visits her sister.
- B: Whenever Cheryl, is in town she visits her sister.
- C: Whenever Cheryl is in town she visits her sister.
- D: Whenever Cheryl is in town, she visits her sister.

6. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

- A: Tell Logan we will meet him at the park (the one on First Street).
- B: Tell Logan we will meet him at the park, the one on First Street).
- C: Tell Logan we will meet him (at the park) the one on First Street.
- D: Tell Logan we will meet him at the park (the one on First Street).

7. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

- A: Mom, said "Be home by dinnertime."
- B: Mom said, "Be home by dinnertime."
- C: Mom said "Be home by dinnertime."

8. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

- A: "Get your math books out." Miss Diamond said, "so we can get started."
- B: "Get your math books out," Miss Diamond said, "so we can get started."
- C: "Get your math books out" Miss Diamond said "so we can get started."

9. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: I asked (actually) I begged Dad to let me go to the movies.

B: I asked (actually I begged Dad to let me go to the movies.

C: I asked (actually I begged) Dad to let me go to the movies.

D: I asked actually I begged Dad to let me go (to the movies).

10. Choose the two sentences with correct punctuation.

A: My little sister always wants me to read the book Blueberries for Sal to her.

B: My little sister always wants me to read the bookBlueberries for Sal to her.

C: My little sister always wants me to read the book "Blueberries for Sal" to her.

D: My little sister always wants me to read the bookBlueberries for Sal to her.

11. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: "I know what you're getting for your birthday." my brother said.

B: "I know what you're getting for your birthday", my brother said.

C: "I know what you're getting for your birthday," my brother said.

D: "I know what you're getting for your birthday" ,my brother said.

12. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: Mr. Swinburnsons desk is always messy.

B: Mr. Swinburnson's desk is always messy.

13. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: I don't want to play dodge ball.

B: I dont want to play dodge ball.

14. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: My little brother's favorite song is Wheels on the Bus.

B: My little brother's favorite song is "Wheels on the Bus".

C: My little brother's favorite song is Wheels on the Bus.

D: My little brother's favorite song is Wheels on the Bus.

15. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: The girl's will have gym first today.

B: The girls will have gym first today.

16. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: The book's cover was almost ruined.

B: The books cover was almost ruined.

17. Choose the sentence with correct punctuation.

A: There are lots of dog's on this street.

B: There are lots of dogs on this street.