

Précis Writing

Precis Writing

- ▶ Precis writing is an exercise in compression.
- ▶ A precis is the gist of a passage expressed in as few words as possible.
- ▶ A precis should give all essential points so that anyone reading it will be able to understand the idea expressed in the original passage.
- ▶ *Precis writing involves summarizing a document to extract the maximum amount of information and conveying this information to a reader in the minimum number of words*
- ▶ Precis writing is different from paraphrasing.
 - ▶ In a paraphrase you should give all the details: you should not leave out any details. A paraphrase will be at least as long and sometimes longer than the original.
 - ▶ A precis, on the other hand, must always be shorter than the original. It should express only the main theme that too as briefly as possible.
- ▶ There are no rigid rules regarding the length of a precis. But as a general rule, it should not contain more than a third of the total number of words in the original passage.
- ▶ Precis writing improves your overall writing skills. It teaches you how to express your thoughts clearly, concisely and effectively. You learn to choose your words carefully and construct your sentences in a logical and concise manner.

Precis Writing

- ▶ The following qualities are essential to a precis:
 - ▶ **Completeness** The precis must have the essential contents of the original passage without omitting any important fact or idea.
 - ▶ **Compactness** All the ideas reproduced from the original document should form a compact whole. The words and sentences should convey a sense of unity with each other.
 - ▶ **Conciseness** Conciseness is achieved by the process of sifting essential from unessential information, by avoiding repetition, and by omitting ornamental phrases. However, conciseness should not be achieved at the cost of clarity. All the original essential ideas should be presented clearly but in brief.
 - ▶ **Clarity** This can be achieved by getting rid of circumlocutions and unclear statements. It should be intelligible to even those readers who have not gone through the original document.
 - ▶ **Coherence** All sentences and ideas in a precis should follow a reasonable and natural order of development. Thus, the precis should not look like a collection of disjointed sentences, but a well-connected whole.

Steps to Effective Precis Writing

- ▶ **Identify the reader and purpose of the précis:** This step determines how much detail should be included and how formal the precis needs to be. For instance, the precis from a textbook chapter for study purposes need not be as carefully refined as the executive summary of a formal report for an important client.
- ▶ **Read the original document:** Skim-read the document to get an overview, then read it again slowly to identify the main themes and to distinguish the key ideas and concepts from the unimportant ones.
- ▶ **Underline the key ideas and concepts:** Each paragraph should have one key topic, which the rest of the paragraph clarifies, supports, and develops. Write down a title that sums up the theme of the passage. The title or heading is the precis of a precis and indicates what is to follow. Hence, it should reflect the central idea of the passage. It can be a word, a phrase, or even a short sentence. A suitable title must be provided even if it is not asked for.
- ▶ **Write a note-form summary of each paragraph:** The passage should be summed up in the form of points. This should always be done in one's own words as far as possible. All irrelevant material should be omitted.
- ▶ **Write the précis:** The original text should be rewritten to express the summarized points more concisely and to develop them into coherent sentences, expressing all important points in a generalized form. Any repetitions or irrelevant details should be eliminated. Only the third person and indirect speech should be used. No personal comments should be added.
- ▶ **Review and edit:** Compare the precis with the original document and make sure that it emphasizes the same points. Ensure that the precis is readable, concise, and coherent.

Guidelines for Effective Precis Writing

PRECIS...

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

Precis

Summary

A small replica or a model of any passage or article

A shortened description of any passage or article

Precis must have an apt heading

The heading is not so important but reference to the original sources should be mentioned as ('A summary of ...')

It always maintains the order of the original piece and is always in written format

Not specifically have to maintain the order and can be written as well as spoken

Only the absolute essential points are mentioned in a Precis

Covers all the important points in the briefest form, mentioned in a piece of writing

It uses the same tone and mood (as given in the writing piece) to express the idea. i.e. it retains the original idea and voice of the given piece of writing, article or anything

This is expressed in the readers or listeners' own words. It omits details and does not include the interpretation as originally mentioned in the article, writing, speech etc.

In a Precis, the reader reads a piece of information and has to extract the main idea that is being talked about.

In summary, the reader or listener decides what are the main points that need to be expressed from the given piece.

Maintains the keywords, Data and Concept from the source

This expresses the main idea of each paragraph and evidence in support of that idea from the original source

Exercise

► Trees give shade for the benefit of others, and while they themselves stand in the sun and endure the scorching heat, they produce the fruit of which others profit. The character of good men is like that of trees. What is the use of this perishable body if no use is made of it for the benefit of mankind? Sandalwood, the more it is rubbed, the more scent does it yield. Sugarcane, the more it is peeled and cut up into pieces, the more juice does it produce. The men who are noble at heart do not lose their qualities even in losing their lives. What matters whether men praise them or not? What difference does it make whether they die at this moment or whether lives are prolonged? Happen what may, those who tread in the right path will not set foot in any other. Life itself is unprofitable to a man who does not live for others. To live for the mere sake of living one's life is to live the life of dogs and crows. Those who lay down their lives for the sake of others will assuredly dwell forever in a world of bliss.

► **Precis**

Good men live for others

Good men have character like that of trees. They live for others and do not lose their qualities even in losing their lives. They always follow the right path. Praise is immaterial to them. To live for one's own sake is to lead the life of beasts. Only those who lay down their lives for others will live for ever in a world of bliss.