

Précis Writing

What is a Précis?

A précis is an intelligent summary of a long passage. It aims at testing your understanding of the passage. As it is a summary, it is always shorter than the original passage. It expresses only the main theme as concisely as possible.

Writing a Précis

DOs

- Read the passage carefully; more than once if needed.
Make a note of the important points.
- Make at least two drafts—a rough one and a fair one.
- The rough draft has the essence of the original passage.
- The fair draft is a good summary of the main points from the rough draft.

DON'Ts

- Express your own opinion.
- Use a question in the précis.
- Use abbreviations or contractions.

Let us examine a few précis writing samples.

Précis Writing Samples

Sample 1

There is an enemy beneath our feet—an enemy more deadly for his complete impartiality. He recognises no national boundaries, no political parties. Everyone in the world is threatened by him. The enemy is the Earth itself. When an earthquake strikes, the world trembles. The power of a quake is greater than anything man himself can produce. But today scientists are directing a great deal of their effort into finding some way of combating earthquakes and, perhaps at some time in the near future, mankind will have discovered a means of protecting itself from earthquakes. 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. Buildings collapse, bridges fall, dams burst and 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 valley. Consider the terrifying statistics from the past 1755: Lisbon, capital of Portugal—the city was destroyed entirely and 450 killed; 1970: Peru—50,000 killed. 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 80 feet farther west into the Pacific Ocean. Imagine the power of something that can move an entire subcontinent! This is the problem that the scientists face. They are dealing with forces so immense that man 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 property. (329 words)

Rough Draft

1. Earthquake is one of the worst enemies of mankind.
2. It causes great damage as it strikes without warning.
3. Scientists are finding ways to combat the disaster.
4. Earthquakes cause great damage to life and property.
5. Statistics have reported that the intensity of earthquakes can be so terrible that they can move an entire continent.
6. Alaska moved over 80 feet farther west into the Pacific Ocean when an earthquake struck in 1968.

TITLE: Earthquake—the enemy beneath our feet

PRECIS: An earthquake is one of the worst enemies of mankind as it causes great damage to life and property. Statistics have reported that the intensity of earthquakes can be so terrible that they can move an entire continent. Alaska moved over 80 feet farther west into the Pacific Ocean when an earthquake struck in 1968. Scientists are finding ways to combat the disaster, but the problem is that it strikes without warning, and only precautionary measures can be taken to save life and property. (84 words)

Sample 2

Coffee is traditionally grown in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu in India. It is predominantly an export-oriented commodity and 65% to 70% of coffee produced in the country is exported, while the rest is consumed within the country. In the international market, Indian Robusta is highly preferred for its good blending quality. Arabica coffee from India is also well received in the international market. Coffee is an export product with low import intensity and high employment content. This is evident from the fact that more than six lakh persons are directly employed and an equal number of individuals get indirect employment from this sector. Arabica is mild coffee, but the beans being more aromatic; it has higher market value compared to Robusta beans. On the other hand, Robusta has more strength and is therefore used in making various blends. Arabica is grown in higher altitudes than Robusta. The cool and equable temperature, ranging between 15°C and 25°C, is suitable for Arabica, while for Robusta, hot and humid climate with temperature ranging from 20°C to 30°C is suitable. Arabica requires more care and nurture and is more suitable for large holdings, whereas Robusta is suitable irrespective of the size of the farm. Arabica is susceptible to pests and diseases such as White Stem Borer, leaf rust, and requires more shade than Robusta. The harvest of Arabica takes place between November and January, while for Robusta, it is from December to February. (240 words)

Rough Draft

1. Coffee is grown in India as an export commodity in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
2. Six lakh persons are directly employed because of coffee as an export product.
3. Arabica and Robusta are the two varieties grown in the Indian market.
4. Arabica has more market value being more aromatic.
5. It requires more nurturing as it is prone to pests and diseases.
6. It is harvested between November and January, while Robusta is harvested between December and February.

TITLE: Coffee in India

PRECIS: India grows coffee as an export commodity in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Coffee production employs six lakh persons directly in India. Arabica and Robusta are the two varieties grown in the Indian market and the former has more market value as it is more aromatic than Robusta. Arabica requires more nurturing as it is prone to pests and diseases. It is harvested between November and January, while Robusta is harvested between December and February. (75 words)

Sample 3

When we survey our lives and efforts, we soon observe that almost the whole of our actions and desires are bound up with the existence of other human beings. We notice that whole nature resembles that of the social animals. We eat food that others have produced, wear clothes that others have made, live in houses that others have built. The greater part of our knowledge and beliefs has been passed on to us by other people through the medium of a language which others have created. Without language and mental capacities, we would have been poor indeed comparable to higher animals.

We have therefore to admit that we owe our principal knowledge over the least to the fact of living in human society. The individual if left alone from birth would remain primitive and beast like in his thoughts and feelings to a degree that we can hardly imagine. The individual is what he is and has the significance that he has not much in virtue of the individuality, but rather as a member of a great human community, which directs his material and spiritual existence from the cradle to the grave. (193 words)

Rough Draft

1. Humans are social animals.
2. They depend on each other for necessities and social needs.
3. Humans use language to communicate with each other and further their mental development.
4. Humans are superior to animals as they live in societies that guide their material and spiritual existence.

TITLE: Man and society

PRECIS: Human beings have their actions and desires bound up with society as they are social animals. They depend on each other for food and clothes and share their knowledge and beliefs, and use language created by others to communicate, which helps in their mental development. They are superior to beasts because they live in human society. An individual left alone since birth would grow utterly beast like. The human society guides man's material and spiritual existence. (76 words)

Sample 4

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. (171 words)

Rough Draft

1. Discipline is disliked by many.
2. Discipline moulds our minds and habits.
3. Discipline should not be treated as an imposition.
4. Discipline is an outcome of good habits.

TITLE: The Importance of Discipline

PRÉCIS: Although many people detest discipline, it is crucial in moulding our lives and habits. It should not be treated as an imposition but rather a natural outcome of good habits. (30 words)

Sample 5

Teaching is one of the noblest of professions. A teacher performs the sacred duty of making his students responsible, compassionate, and disciplined. Apart from developing their intellect, a teacher is also responsible for inculcating the qualities of good citizenship, cleanliness, politeness, and etiquette. These virtues are not easy to be imbibed. Only a person who himself leads a quality life of characterised by simplicity, purity and rigid discipline can successfully cultivate these habits in his pupils.

A teacher always remains young at heart, although he may grow old in age. Perpetual contact with budding youngsters keeps him hale and hearty. There are moments when domestic worries weigh heavily on his mind, but the delightful company of innocent children makes him overcome his transient moods of despair. (126 words)

Rough Draft

1. Teaching is one of the noblest professions.
2. A teacher moulds the intellect and the minds of his students.
3. A teacher inculcates good habits in young citizens.
4. A teacher himself leads a simple life.
5. He remains forever young in the company of his students.

TITLE: BEING A TEACHER

PRÉCIS: A teacher is not only responsible for disciplining students but also moulding their character. A teacher inculcates good habits in students, as he himself leads a simple and a disciplined life. A teacher may age physically, but the company of his students always keeps him young. (46 words)

Sample 6

A recent visit to the Arctic region brought me face to face with the problem of global warming. It made me realise how massive the change is and how grave its consequences will be for all. The ice caps at the Polar Regions are melting rapidly due to deforestation and the increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. If steps are not taken soon, the rising water levels will submerge all the land masses. Ozone depletion is another serious consequence of global warming. These holes or breaches in the protective cover of our planet let harmful UV rays reach us unfiltered. They in turn cause health hazards which are very difficult to treat. Awareness of these effects of our actions and sustainable steps to prevent it is the need of the hour. (134 Words)

Rough Draft

1. Global warming can lead to grave consequences.
2. Ice caps are melting rapidly.
3. Rising water levels a threat to land masses.
4. Global warming is causing ozone depletion and health hazards.

TITLE: Global Warming

PRÉCIS: The consequences of global warming are grave. The ice caps, which are melting due to deforestation and the increasing levels of carbon dioxide can cause a rise in the water levels and submerge land masses. Global warming can lead to ozone depletion. Lack of preventive measures can either cause health hazards or extinction of species. (55 words)

Sample 7

It is observed that in schools offering co-education, there is often a power struggle between boys and girls. Even teachers become a part of this when they compare the two and pass gender-biased judgements. Such a treatment is harmful for the overall wellbeing of the students, as their self-esteem is damaged on receiving undue criticism from teachers. According to research, boys are often neglected in co-ed schools. Right from their childhood, they are expected to be tougher, stronger and better than the girls. This is a disadvantage for both the genders. When girls are not challenged enough, it makes them repressed and dependent. On the other hand, boys are challenged to such an extent that their childhood and innocence is lost. (121 words)

Rough Draft

1. Co-education schools display a power struggle between boys and girls
2. Teachers too compare and judge
3. Negative feedback crushes students' self-esteem
4. Boys are neglected in co-ed schools
5. Boys and girls are stereotyped right from schools.

TITLE: The Challenges in a Co-Education System

PRÉCIS: Co-education schools often show a power struggle between boys and girls. Boys are constantly pushed beyond their limits and girls are repressed. Their childhood and innocence is lost in this struggle, as the negativity and stereotyping from the teachers crushes their self-esteem. (42 words)

Sample 8

Miss Sullivan was an exceptionally brilliant teacher to Helen Keller. She dedicated her entire life for the training and education of Helen. She was chosen by Mr Anognos, the director of Perkins Institution, and took up the challenge with conviction. She had to face a lot of difficulties to get the child to respond to her presence. She was kicked and pinched by Helen, but her resistance did not waver Miss Sullivan's decision. She persevered to gain her trust and then gradually began to teach her. She used her expertise and patience while developing innovative methods to teach Helen. She loved her student dearly and was always available for her aid. She helped Helen see the world through her eyes. She dedicated herself entirely for her education. Her dedication and constant support motivated Keller in her life. The day she first met Helen was rightly called by her as 'her soul's birthday'. (152 words)

Rough Draft

1. Miss Sullivan was chosen by the director of Perkins Institution to train Helen Keller.
2. She persevered to gain her trust.
3. Used her expertise and innovative methods to teach her.
4. She became Helen's eyes and dedicated her entire life for the training and education of Helen.

TITLE: Miss Sullivan

PRÉCIS: Miss Sullivan, who was chosen by the director of Perkins Institution to train Helen Keller, used her expertise and innovative methods to teach Helen. Miss Sullivan persevered to gain her trust and thus became her eyes, thereby dedicating her entire life to the training and education of Helen. (48 words)

Sample 9

How I Taught My Grandmother to Read is a short story written by Sudha Murthy who remembers one of her childhood experiences when her grandmother wanted to learn the Alphabet. The author was still young, and the story is about a time when there were no television serials or movies in India. The elders took interest in the stories and novels published in a popular Kannada magazine. One of the novels was Kaashi Yatre, written by Triveni. It was the grandmother's favourite novel, as she identified herself with the old woman in the novel. Like the old woman in the novel, the author's grandmother also dreamt of being educated. After being married at a young age and bearing children, grandmother had to abandon studies. Therefore, unable to read or write, she would ask the author to read the novel to her. Once, when the author had gone for a wedding, the magazine arrived but grandmother could not read it as the author was away. When the author returned home, her grandmother requested her to become her guru and teach her to read. Grandmother explained her little granddaughter about her long forgotten love to learn reading and writing. The author agreed to teach her grandmother. In a few days, grandmother could read the Alphabet. On the day of Durga Puja, she read the title of the book, Kaashi Yatre, on her own. The author gave her a copy of the book Kaashi Yatre and grandmother touched her feet in respect; as she was a student touching the feet of her teacher. (260 words)

Rough Draft

1. Sudha Murthy's grandmother liked the novel Kaashi Yatre, written by Triveni.
2. Since she couldn't read, she was dependent on the author who would read the novel to her every week.
3. Once when the author was away from home, the magazine arrived.
4. Grandmother couldn't read it and had to wait for her granddaughter to return home.
5. Grandmother decided to learn the Alphabet from her.
6. Eventually, her grandmother could read the title of the novel on her own.
7. On Durga Puja day, the grandmother touched the author's feet as a mark of respect for her guru.

TITLE: Grandmother Learns to Read

PRÉCIS: Sudha Murthy's grandmother was dependent on her for reading her favourite novel, Kaashi Yatre published in the weekly magazine because she couldn't read it on her own. Once when the author was away, the magazine arrived but her grandmother couldn't read it. When the author returned, her grandmother requested her to become her teacher and help her learn the Alphabet. The author's grandmother not only learnt to read but also touched the author's feet as a mark of respect for her guru on Durga Puja day. (86 words)

Sample 10

There are different types products received from forests in India. Forest products are important in the growth and development of industries. Timber is utilised in building activities, industries and in carpentry workshops. Asia's largest saw mill is in operation in the Andaman Islands. Rubber trees are grown in large numbers on the Western Ghats. A large number of industries are dependent on rubber in the Peninsular India. Wood pulp is made from the wood of the forests and paper is manufactured from the pulp. The States of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh have several paper mills The city of Nepa in Madhya Pradesh has a newsprint industry. Lac and Wax are used in manufacturing paints. (118 Words)

Rough Draft

1. Timber is used in building and carpentry.
2. Rubber is grown in the Western Ghats.
3. There are many rubber industries in Peninsular India.
4. Wood pulp is used in making paper.
5. Lac and wax are used in making paints.

TITLE: Forest Products

PRÉCIS: Different products are received from forests in India. Timber is used in building and carpentry. The rubber trees from the Western Ghats serve many industries in the Peninsular India. The pulp extracted from wood is used for making paper. Lac and wax are used in making paints. (47 words)