

There are many **Maxims, Sayings, Proverbs, and Quotations** in the English language, which appear to be very small but are really packed full of meaning. They carry very deep meaning. Each one of them can be expanded into a full essay or a long paragraph. They are highly epigrammatic and aphoristic. They can be explained and expanded to the length of a paragraph. This type of exercise is called **Expansion** or **Paragraph writing**. This type of exercise gives a very useful training towards the art of composition.

We give below a few examples of **Expansion** or **Paragraph** writing.

## (1) Honesty Is The Best Policy

Honesty is indeed the best policy, provided we understand and interpret the terms 'policy' and 'honesty' correctly. Policy here does not mean a certain kind of tact or strategy : it here means conduct of life. Similarly, honesty here does not mean merely honest dealings in money matters or business. Honesty is to be interpreted in its widest sense, honesty in word, thought and action. Here honesty is equivalent to truth in its widest and fullest sense. Therefore, the proverb prescribes truthful, noble and conscientious conduct of life in all spheres, private and public. One must follow the path of truth, virtue and nobility in all situations of life. One should conduct oneself in life in such a way that one may not fight shy in facing God in the other world. A noble and virtuous man is God's best creation, God's own image.

## (2) Example is better than Precept

Even a devil can quote scriptures, but only an angel can follow them. It is easy to preach but difficult to practise. Theoretical preaching is very

easy but their practical application in the conduct of life is very difficult. Anybody can preach, but very few can practise what they preach. A mere theoretical preaching makes no real impact on the people. This is why great saints and sages first practised in their own life and conduct what they sought to preach. Their life and conduct were practical lessons in the highest values of life. Lord Christ was a living example of human love and compassion. Mahatma Gandhi was an apostle of truth and non-violence. Thus one practical example is better than a hundred theoretical precepts.

## (3) Virtue is its own Reward

Virtue is not a commercial commodity which can be sold or purchased. Virtue is complete in itself; it has no ulterior or external object to gain; it is its own reward. The practitioner of virtue feels a sense of gratification, a kind of happiness and bliss which far transcends the pleasure that one can derive from material possessions or practical success in life. The practitioner of virtue does not enjoy prosperity; he may even fail to achieve much success in life, but for all that he does not feel depressed or frustrated. He follows the principle of selfless and detached 'Karma' as preached by Lord Krishna in the **Gita**. He would constantly keep in his mind the doctrine of disinterested doing of duty : Do thy duty, reward is not thy concern. Virtue is its own reward.

## (4) Handsome is that Handsome Does

Ordinarily a person is considered to be handsome if he has physical beauty and grace. But this is a very superficial and deceptive concept of beauty. Physical beauty is a very short-lived and transitory phenomenon. No physical thing can

ever last against the ravages of time. So says Shakespeare :

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,

But sad mortality o'ersways their power,

How with this rage shall beauty hold its plea

Whose action is no stronger than a flower ?

Wherein lies, then, permanent human beauty? It lies in one's good and noble deeds. We live in deeds, not in years. We can immortalize ourselves by doing good deeds. Physical charm is momentary, but the fragrance of good deeds is permanent. We shall be admired, honoured and remembered if we are morally handsome, and not if we are only physically handsome. It is our good deeds that add to our personality, that enhance our grace and charm, that ennoble us and make us really handsome.

### (5) Knowledge is Power

At the source and root of all power there is knowledge. Even physical and military power is lame without knowledge. It is knowledge that rules the world. A man of knowledge possesses immense power. Behind all modern armaments and military manoeuvres there is scientific knowledge. Nature is an inexhaustible source of power. Nature reveals all her sources of power to a man of knowledge. It is the scientist, the man of knowledge, who can harness the mighty forces of nature and press them to human service. Also, no man can be a good statesman without knowledge. A good statesman should have full knowledge not only of his own country but also of the whole world, of all international problems and developments. And, finally, the highest form of knowledge is the knowledge of the self. Know thyself : this is the key of all spiritual and mystical experiences. He who has known himself has known the universe. Who can, then, be more powerful than a man of knowledge ? Indeed, knowledge is power.

### (6) The Pen is Mightier than the Sword

The 'pen' in this proverbial sentence symbolises intellectual power and the 'sword' stands for physical power. The proposition, then, is which is superior and stronger between intellectual power and physical power ? Obviously, intellectual power is far more potent and lasting than physical power. The conquests and gains of

the sword or the military force are short-lived, while those of the pen or the intellect are permanent and universal. The empires conquered by Alexander, Caesar, Genghiskhan, Tamerlane, Napoleon have all crumbled into dust and wiped off, but the intellectual and ideological empires built by great thinkers and writers like Manu, Plato, Socrates, Shakespeare, Tulsi, Goethe, Karl Marx, Gandhi are permanent possessions and rocks of shelter and succour to all mankind. The great truths of life that poets, thinkers, philosophers and mystics reveal to mankind inspire, animate, elevate and sustain mankind for all time to come, while the conquests of the sword hardly outlive the conqueror's short lifespan. The pen is, therefore, certainly mightier than the sword.

### (7) The World is too much with us

Wordsworth rightly says that "the world is too much with us" and "getting and spending we lay waste our lives." Indeed, man has become too materialistic. He is so much engrossed in the materialistic pursuits that he has completely forgotten the higher moral, spiritual and emotional values. He has become deaf to the "still small voice of conscience." He deceives, cheats, betrays, and falls to any low level for the sake of material gains. He has lost all peace of mind and remains in constant strain and stress. He has become morally bankrupt and spiritually degenerated. There is no joy in his life, no contentment in his heart. If man wants to save himself, he must draw a balance between his material gains and moral values.

### (8) Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise

The forbidden fruit of knowledge sometimes becomes the cause of great distress and anguish. There are many situations in which lack of knowledge or ignorance is a great blessing. It would be a great folly to probe deep and acquire knowledge into such situations. There are many things and many situations which are beyond the control of man. Any attempt to acquire knowledge about such things and situations would only bring sorrow. The future is unknown to us. It is shrouded in a thick veil of mystery. But if we could know the future, this knowledge would only add to our misery. Children are so happy because they have blessed ignorance : they don't run after knowledge. Solomon says, "He that increaseth

knowledge increaseth sorrow.” Surely then, where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise.

### **(9) Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war**

Ordinarily heroes of war are universally praised and honoured. War is recognized as the greatest heroic exploit and victory in war as a mark of national honour and triumph. But truly speaking, it is not always so, at least not in modern warfare. Wars involve incalculable human suffering and destruction. And even then, the achievements of war are very short lived. One war leads to another war. We fight war to prepare for another war. This vicious series goes on. The only antidote for war is peace. The achievements of peace are far more lasting and renowned than those of war. Art, culture, philosophy, literature, trade, commerce and such other beneficial things flourish only during peace time. The promoters of peace such as Christ, Buddha, Mahavira, Ashok, Gandhi are the real benefactors and saviours of mankind. They are far more renowned than the heroes of war.

### **(10) A thing of beauty is a joy for ever**

An object of beauty is a source of perennial joy. It may be any object of beauty from a tiny flower to the music of spheres, but it gives joy to every human heart. The pretty face of a maiden, the sweet smile of a child, the prismatic colours of the rainbow, the blossoms of spring, the songs of birds, the murmuring music of rivers and the sportive glee of the fountain have the power to charm every human heart. Equally powerful is the appeal of a work of art, be it a painting, a work of sculpture or architecture, a song, a dance performance, or a musical concert. Great works of literature—the plays of Shakespeare or Kalidas, the epics of Homer, Milton or Tulsi, the poetry of Spenser, Keats or Tagore, the stories and novels of Maupassant, Dickens or Prem Chand are perennial sources of aesthetic pleasure. Therefore Keats rightly says :

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever :

Its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness.”

### **(11) Sweet are the uses of adversity**

Normally adversity is a dreaded thing. Nobody wants to fall in the grip of adversity. Everybody wants to live in joy, peace, plenty and prosperity. But a closer analysis would reveal that adversity has its own advantages. In the first place, it is a test of man’s courage, patience, endurance and valour. It is a test of his faith, confidence and will-power. It is equally a test of the loyalty and sincerity of friends, colleagues, and members of the family. It is rightly said : prosperity finds friends, adversity tries them. One can truly understand and evaluate himself as well as others only in periods of adversity. He who can pass through adversity with a cool and balanced mind will ultimately be successful in the world. He who has not known adversity has not known the world.

### **(12) Man is the architect of his own destiny**

It is often believed that man is a toy in the hands of destiny. Our destiny is marked out for us at the time of our birth. Man has no role to play in the determination of his fate or destiny. This is a very fatalistic and pessimistic approach to life. It persuades man to be passive and inactive and leave everything in the hands of the powers above. This approach is very wrong. The truth is that man is himself the architect of his own destiny. He is the maker of his own fate. It is man’s own efforts, his own deeds that determine the course of his life. A bold man, a man of faith, a man of determination, a man of hope and vision would never accept this philosophy of life. He would certainly mark out and determine his own destiny. Napoleon used to say that he carved out his destiny with his sword.

### **(13) Coming events cast their shadows before**

Future is always shrouded in a thick veil of mystery. Man cannot know what is going to happen in future. Yet if we closely understand and analyse the present, we can form some ideas as to what the future is going to be. There is a logical link between the present and the future. There is always a kind of background for all future events. We can judge the character and personality of a man by analysing his childhood. Clouds begin together in the sky before it rains. Situations of

distrust, tension and animosity begin to develop before a war breaks out. We can anticipate a man's future success or failure by assessing his present. This is so because coming events cast their shadows before.

#### **(14) Every sable cloud has a silver lining**

Every situation of life has a blending of good and evil. There is nothing absolutely bad as there is nothing absolutely good. Even the worst and darkest situation of life has some element of goodness in it. Our sorrows and sufferings purify our soul. Adversity makes us bold, courageous and adventurous. Our failures pave the way for our success. Fever purges our entire physical system. And death holds out a promise for a new life. There is indeed a silver lining behind every sable cloud. What we need to have is a deep insight and clear vision to see everything rightly. We should not be disheartened when adverse situations come. We should go by faith, by hope, by vision, and then we shall find a silver lining behind every sable cloud.

#### **(15) It is never too late to mend**

Human life is a tale of errors and follies. Nobody is infallible. We all commit errors and mistakes out of ignorance or inexperience. Man learns by experience, and in the process of acquiring experience man often stumbles and falls down. An intelligent and aspiring man would learn from his mistakes and failings. Every mistake is a lesson, a living sermon. All errors and mistakes should be corrected. No mistake should be repeated a second time. It is never too late to mend. This is the surest way of getting success and happiness in life. If we just keep on brooding over our mistakes without trying to mend them, we shall make our life miserable. No stage is too late to rectify one's mistakes and come to the right path.

#### **(16) Fame is the last infirmity of the noble mind**

Milton says in his famous elegy **Lycidas** :

"Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise,

That last infirmity of the noble mind."

A noble man does his duty and serves mankind without any expectation of reward or gain.

He works in a detached spirit without any near or distant aim in view. He overcomes all temptations, desires and weaknesses that flesh is heir to. But there is one thing that the greatest and noblest of men have not been able to overcome, and that is the desire to fame. Even the greatest and noblest of men have this weakness. They desire to be recognized for their services and be remembered for long. History bears testimony to the fact that even the greatest martyrs desired to have fame in their life-time and after. It is only the supermen like Christ, Buddha, Mahavira, Gandhi who can overcome this temptation.

#### **(17) Discretion is the better part of valour**

Courage and bravery are admirable qualities. One who dares nothing, gains nothing. A coward can do nothing; he can achieve nothing. But courage and bravery should be exercised with discretion and wisdom. Thoughtless and indiscreet display of bravery may do more harm than good. There are certain situations in which patience and forbearance would do better than valour. Sometimes it may be advisable to keep away from the path of danger or challenge. If a huge flood wave comes rising against you, or if you find yourself in the midst of flames, or if you are confronted unarmed with a wounded tiger, or if you are ambushed by a gang of communal fanatics, your discretion should prompt you to run away from the spot and save yourself. Discretion should be the watchword of the brave. We should remember Milton's words : "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

#### **(18) The child is father of the man**

The personality and character of a man is not a freak of nature. There is always a regular pattern and consistent growth in the formation of man's character. The seed of one's character and personality is laid in one's infancy. There is then a consistent growth from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, and from youth to age. As the child is today, the man would be tomorrow. What a man is going to be can be well guessed from his childhood. The child is the man himself on a miniature scale, having all the potentialities of future growth. History bears testimony to the fact that all great men showed signs of their greatness in their formative years in childhood. The growth and evolution of their personality could well be

discerned from the very beginning of their lives. Therefore utmost attention should be paid to a child in his formative years. It is this great truth that Wordsworth enshrines in the famous line : “The child is father of the man.”

### **(19) If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ?**

There is always a regular cyclic order in nature. Sunrise and sunset, day and night, winter and summer, autumn and spring, growth and decay regularly follow each other. So is there a regular cyclic order in human life and fortunes. Joy and sorrow, rise and fall, success and failure, fortune and misfortune, birth and death successively follow each other. There cannot be a permanent winter, as there cannot be a permanent spring; so in life there cannot be a permanent period of misfortunes as there cannot be a permanent period of fortune. So man should have faith in the moral order of God. No period of depression and misfortune, of failure and frustration, of sorrow and suffering can ever be a permanent phase of life. This embodies a philosophy of sterling faith, hope and optimism. This is the message of Shelley, the revolutionary idealist, in this famous line quoted from his “Ode to the West Wind.”

### **(20) Politics is the last refuge of the scoundrel**

The word “politics” has today become synonymous with “treachery” or “opportunism”. It has degenerated into a foul profession. It has been grossly commercialized. Everything is fair in politics. Changing the party, crossing the floor, changing the colour of the cap, politicizing the national problems and calamities, raising the governments today and pulling them down tomorrow have become commonplace things in political life today. The result is that honest and noble people try to keep away from politics. The scoundrels often use politics as an umbrella to protect themselves from the arm of law. But it would be equally wrong to suggest that all politicians are scoundrels. There are many who are honest, noble, selfless, honourable and really dedicated to the service of the motherland. But a big majority of them are really bad and they have brought infamy to the whole class.

### **(21) To travel hopefully is better than to arrive**

Man lives by hope. Hope is the sustaining force. Human life is a long journey from hope to hope. When one hope breaks, the next hope allures man and prompts him to keep on the journey. Thus from hope to hope man travels until the end of the journey comes in death. Further, life is a prolonged struggle, a persistent endeavour to achieve some ideal, some cherished goal. The efforts made towards achieving this goal are more pleasure-giving than the goal itself. As soon as the goal is achieved, its charm vanishes. The journey towards the moon was more thrilling than the landing on the moon. As soon as man put his foot on the surface of the moon, he found it a barren land of rocks and dust. Immediately the charm was broken. Surely, then, to travel hopefully is better than to arrive.

### **(22) The old order changeth yielding place to the new**

Change is the law of nature. Everything dead or alive, animate or inanimate is changing continuously. Even the stars, the planets, the earth, the oceans and mountains and the uncontrollable forces of nature are constantly changing. In the living world of men, animals and plants things change even more fast and perceptibly. The old order must change and give place to the new. This is the process of evolution and progress. Old cultures and civilizations, old customs and manners, old systems and institutions, old thoughts and beliefs have changed and gone and given place to the new ones. Ancient kingdoms and empires have gone. Ancient palaces and monuments, forts and castles, temples and churches have all gone. The old generation is gradually dying out and new generation is coming up. The new generation must replace the old one. This is the natural process of change, evolution and progress.

### **(23) More things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of**

When all human efforts fail, man takes to prayer. And very often prayers bring miraculous results. But the condition is that the prayer should



be sincere and genuine. It must come from the depth of the heart, not merely from the lips. Sincere prayer has a spiritual force in it. What comes from the soul of man goes to the Divine spirit. In such a situation things happen so miraculously that human reasoning fails to explain or analyse them. Many such events are recorded in history. It is a well known historical fact that the Mughal Emperor Babur saved the life of his young prince Jahangir from imminent death by prayer. These are great mysteries beyond the understanding of man. Therefore it is rightly said that more things are wrought by prayer than the world dreams of.

#### **(24) There's a divinity that shapes our ends**

Man was created in the image of God. God endowed man with great talents and faculties—physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. He gave man full freedom to choose whatever course of life he thought fit for himself, to do whatever he liked, to accept or reject whatever his conscience chose. But God kept to himself, in his own hands, the ultimate end. The final destiny of man rests with God. Man can work; he can make persistent efforts; he can endeavour to the end, but the final outcome of all his efforts would depend upon the will of God. God is the Supreme Power without whose will and sanction nothing can happen. Man's success or failure, his rise or fall, his happiness or unhappiness, his triumph or defeat depend upon God's will. Surely, it is divinity that shapes our ends.

### **Exercise**

**Expand into a paragraph the central idea contained in the following statements :**

1. All the world's a stage.
2. East is east, west is west.
3. All that glitters is not gold.
4. Rome was not built in a day.
5. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.
6. Well begun is half done.
7. Brevity is the soul of wit.
8. To err is human, to forgive divine.
9. Birds of a feather flock together.
10. Art lies in concealing art.
11. Prosperity finds friends, adversity tries them.
12. A rolling stone gathers no moss.
13. Neither a borrower nor a lender be.
14. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.
15. The proper study of mankind is man.
16. Lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime.
17. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.
18. Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter.
19. Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.
20. Money is a good servant but a bad master.
21. Fortune favours the brave.
22. United we stand, divided we fall.
23. They never die who fall in a noble cause.
24. What can war but endless wars still breed.
25. Where there is sorrow, there is holy ground.