

Importance of Precis—**Precis** is important not merely for understanding a certain language and writing in it. It is equally important in day-to-day activities and duties in personal life and official obligations. Today the important statesmen, businessmen, and officers are so busy that they do not have time to study and comprehend long write-ups, notings, representations and speeches. Therefore their Personal Secretaries place before them the precis of all such documents, which they can easily understand and dispose of. Therefore there is always a question on Precis-writing in English in every important competitive examination. A student must, therefore, have good practice in Precis-writing.

What is Precis ?

Precis (pronounced as 'presee') is a French word. Its nearest equivalent in English is **Precise**, which means 'to shorten'. In other words, **Precis** means to express the central thought of a given passage / document as briefly as possible. There is a difference also between **Precis** and **Summary** or **Central Idea**. In **Summary** every remark, observation or thought has to be summarized irrespective of whether it is important or not. Even repetitions have to be summarized over again. It is not obligatory in a **Summary** even to arrange the thoughts systematically. But in **Precis** thoughts have to be arranged logically and systematically. A **Summary** can be loose, jerky, repetitive or formless, but these short-comings are unpardonable in a **Precis**. The **Central Idea** is also different from a **Precis** in as much as it is very short.

Precis as a work of art—**Precis** is a more logical, consistent, complete, and artistically finished work of art. But the **Precis**-writer has no right to express his own view, point or opinion in the **Precis**. In point of thought he has to stick faithfully to the original Passage. Therefore a **Precis**-writer is exhorted thus :

"Be faithful to the original in presenting ideas, as well as the tone or the mood of the passage. The aim (of precis-writing) is to absorb mentally the gist of the original passage, and then to re-express the meaning in one's own way. Then the passage must, as it were, be distilled in the alembic of the mind. It is this process which distinguishes a good precis from one which is poor and mechanical. It involves concentration, judgment, retention of ideas, wide vocabulary and originality of expression."

Length of the Precis—The **Precis** should be about **one-third** of the given passage. In most Question-Papers the number of words in the passage is given at the end, and therefore the **Precis** should contain approximately one-third of the words in the passage. A margin of ten percent more or less is permissible, but for every word above or below this limit marks are deducted. This is why in higher competitive examinations a graph-paper is provided for writing the **Precis**, so that the examiner can know the number of words used in the **Precis** at a glance. Therefore this rule regarding the length of the **Precis** should be carefully observed.

Title of the Precis—The title of the **Precis** must be given, even if it is not asked. The hint for the title can be found in the central idea of the passage. In fact, the title is the central idea of the central idea—the **Precis** of the **Precis**. It should also be remembered that every word of the title (except Articles, Prepositions and Conjunctions) should begin with a capital letter.

Use of Third Person—**Precis** should always be written in the **Third Person**, even if the Original passage is in the First Person or Dialogue form.

Things to be avoided in the Precis—The following things should be avoided in writing the **Precis** :

- (a) Your own views and opinions should not come in the Precis.
- (b) Repetitions should not be allowed to come.
- (c) As far as possible, examples and illustrations should not be used.
- (d) Quotations and anecdotes should also be avoided.
- (e) The use of Similes, Metaphors and other literary artifices should be avoided.
- (f) Nothing irrelevant or out-of-context matter should be allowed to come in.

Language—The language of the Precis should be simple, straight forward, accurate and precise. This is very necessary because every word in the Precis is counted. Every inaccurate, superfluous or wrong word in the Precis is penalised.

How to Write a Precis

Precis-writing is not an easy task. It requires long and sustained practice. To begin with, the given passage should slowly and carefully be read over at least two times. It is natural that a student will not be able to understand the meaning of every word or phrase in the passage. But this should not discourage him. First of all, the main topic with which the passage deals should be located. The main topics can be, for example—Education, Literature, Society, Politics, History, Civic or Social Life, Patriotism, some Scientific Discovery or Invention, etc. Having located the main topic, attempt should be made to find out the specific aspect of the main topic with which the passage deals. Having done so, the passage should be read over a third time, and this time the main ideas in the passage should be underlined. The meanings of difficult words and phrases should be guessed in the light of the specific topic and the context by common sense. The portions underlined as above should then be logically arranged and a rough draft of the Precis should be prepared. This draft should be revised, corrected and polished and the number of words in the draft should be increased or decreased as per the number of words in the given passage. Repetitions, vague or obscure words, examples and illustrations, use of literary artifices should judiciously be avoided.

It is also necessary that the sentences in the Precis should not be disconnected or disjointed. For this it is necessary that the sentences be connected by proper and appropriate connective words and phrases. The more popular connectives are these :

Thus; therefore; consequently; accordingly; thereupon; as a result; because of this; besides; moreover; apart from; in addition to; in the end; finally; under these circumstances; on the contrary, etc.

With all these aids, the final draft should be drawn and written out in the Answer-book or on the graph-paper provided for this purpose.

Finally the Title of the Precis must be given.

We give below **ten** passages for Precis-writing. The first five of them have been solved as models. Below the remaining five passages their central ideas and meanings of difficult words have been given for the help of the student. It should be remembered that the central idea has been given for help—it is not the Precis of the Passage.

Model Precis Exercises

1. (Solved)

Make a Precis of the following passage in about *one-third* of its length and give a suitable title to it :—

Democracy is the most difficult of all forms of government and yet it is one to which most nations now aspire. This is because it seems to most people to be the form of government which provides the best hope of making a world in which privileges, good fortune or the accidents of history will no longer determine the spheres of opportunity. In this the human spirit will develop best. A successful democratic system requires a number of pre-conditions, most of them difficult in themselves to establish. It requires the active cooperation of the community for the common good. It requires institutions which can ensure that those who obey the law will not become the victims of those who do not. It requires a mutual respect and shared pride in the objectives and traditions of the community as a whole. It requires the absence of any form of discrimination based on race, sex, belief or opinion. It requires especially from those who have power and influence, restraint and patience.

(170 Words)

Solution**Title : Spirit of Democracy**

Democracy is the most difficult, yet the most sought after form of government. It promises to provide equal opportunities and privileges to all for the best development of human spirit. But for this the pre-condition is that all people are law-abiding, mutually respectful and tolerant, proud of their traditions and free from all kinds of prejudices and discrimination. **(58 Words)**

2. (Solved)

Make a Precis of the following passage in about one-third of its length and give it a suitable title:—

Your mental attitude is a great determining influence in your daily life. Begin the day with an expectant and energetic mental attitude towards your work and it will elevate and enhance all your activities. The spirit in which you regard the world and your fellow-men will be reflected back to you. When you are in the right mental attitude many things will seem to conspire and co-operate to advance your work and interests. Primarily it is your mental attitude that makes the day happy and productive, or the contrary. You can demonstrate the truth of this today by looking only for the best, to be intelligently optimistic, and to have confidence in the eternal supremacy of God. Make more positive resolutions regarding the things you ought to do and bring every possible reinforcement to bear upon such resolutions. Assert in vigorous tones the thoughts you wish to establish as unconscious habits of your life, remembering always that while it is a great thing to conceive a great idea, it is still greater to put it into execution. **(180 Words)**

Solution**Title : Value of Mental Attitude**

One's mental attitude plays a very important role in one's life and career. One's attitude must be healthy, active and reasonably optimistic. One must begin the day with a happy, energetic and hopeful resolution with a firm faith in God's moral order and divine justice. This attitude will change the entire complexion of life and make one more active, assertive and successful. **(62 Words)**

3. (Solved)

Make a Precis of the following passage in about one-third of its length and give it a suitable title :—

To know one's own business and to mind nothing else, that is the way to carry on the work of life. This sounds like a common saying, yet few really acknowledge it, even in principle. It is not often that even the first step—that of knowing what one's business is—is honestly taken; it must be allowed that with many there are intellectual as well as moral difficulties in the way of this first step. The easier method of getting rid of the intellectual difficulty is for a man to ask himself what is not his business; and many a kindly person may be surprised to find that he has been in the habit of considering it a virtue to waste time, thought, feeling, and other means of interests which truly are no business of his at all. He may have to confess that he has been constantly wasting sympathy on sorrows and evils which he cannot remove or alleviate. Sympathy which does not mean action of some sort is not much of a virtue in any man; while in those human beings who habitually indulge in sympathy for its own sake, it is apt to become a hateful and vicious cowardice. **(202 Words)**

Solution**Title : Know Your Business**

A man's first duty is to know his business and act honestly and faithfully in his own sphere. Many a good-intentioned person unknowingly wastes much of his time, energy and emotional sensibility in ideological and passive sympathy for many sorts of human sufferings which he can neither remove nor alleviate. This kind of sympathy is not only useless but thoughtless and meaningless also. Habitual indulgence in this kind of sympathy is imbecile and cowardly. **(73 Words)**

4. (Solved)

Make a Precis of the following passage in about one-third of its length and give it a suitable title :—

I take it that the whole object of education is, in the first place, to train the faculties of the young in such a manner as to give their possessors the best chance of being happy and useful in their generation; and, in the second place, to furnish them with the most important portions of that immense capitalized experience of the human race which we call knowledge of various kinds. I am using the term knowledge in its widest possible sense; and the question is, what subjects to select

by training and discipline, in which the object I have just defined may be best attained.

I must call attention further to this fact, that all the subjects of our thoughts—all feelings and propositions (leaving aside our sensations as the mere materials and occasions of thinking and feeling), all our mental furniture—may be classified under one of two heads—as either within the province of the intellect, something that can be put into propositions and affirmed or denied; or as within the province of feeling, or that which, before the name was defined, was called the aesthetic side of our nature, and which can neither be proved nor disproved, but only felt and known.

According to the classification which I have put before you, then, the subjects of all knowledge are divisible into two groups, matters of science and matters of art; for all things with which the reasoning faculty alone is occupied, come under the province of science; and in the broadest sense, and not in the narrow and technical sense in which we are now accustomed to use the word art, all things feelable, all things which stir our emotions, come under the term of art, in the sense of the subject-matter of the aesthetic faculty. So that we are shut up to this—that the business of education is, in the first place, to provide the young with the means and the habit of observation; and, secondly to supply the subject-matter of knowledge either in the shape of science or of art, or both combined.

(354 Words)

Solution

Title : Object of Education

Broadly speaking, education aims to achieve two objectives—first, to train the student in such a way as to make his life happy and useful, and secondly to provide him with knowledge of various kinds. The knowledge imparted by education embodies the immense experience acquired by the human race through ages. This knowledge, again, can be classified under two heads—one, relating to the intellect or reasoning, the other relating to the sphere of feeling. The first belongs to the category of science and the second to that of arts. Science deals with the objects that can be rationally explained and objectively proved or disproved. Art deals with matters relating to feelings and emotions. True education combines the two categories into one.

(122 Words)

5. (Solved)

Make a Precis of the following passage in about one-third of its length and give it a suitable title :—

Some of the things which Science has given us have certainly helped to make our lives happier. Science has helped us to get rid of many sicknesses of the body. That is a great thing. It is difficult to be happy if your body is full of pain. Scientists have made many discoveries which have helped to make painless, and to remove the causes of pain and sickness. By making it possible to cure terrible diseases—such as malaria, small-pox, plague, pneumonia and tuberculosis—Science has made longer the life of the average man.

Science is helping man to produce much more food from the earth. By this, it is helping to get rid of famine and to prevent sickness caused by not having enough food to eat. It has also made possible the sending of quick relief to places where there is shortage of food and medicines, with the help of motor-lorries, railway trains, ships and aeroplanes. That is also very good, and many lives are saved in such ways.

There are also many discoveries of Science which have definitely brought unhappiness into the world. But that is not because the discoveries are bad, but because men are using them badly. For example, consider the discovery of gun-powder and of other explosives, each more powerful than the previous one discovered. In ancient times men could wound and kill each other only if they were near enough to strike each other with stones, arrows, spears or swords. Even in battles, the armies on both sides usually consisted of a few thousand men, so the number wounded and killed was not very large. In most wars the peasants went on cultivating their fields peacefully, even when the armies were fighting a few miles away. But the invention of fire-arms and high explosives caused a great change. A modern machine-gun, or quick-firing gun, worked by a single man, can wound and kill hundreds of people in a few minutes. One modern bomb can kill hundreds of thousands of people immediately if it was dropped on a big city.

The scientists who invented these terrible weapons are not wicked men who enjoy killing. They are people with kind hearts, but they are more clever, and they earn their living by discovering new things.

(385 Words)

Solution

Title : Blessings and Curses of Science

Science is both a blessing and a curse. While it has given us many things which have made life better and happier, it has also given terrible instruments of destruction. Science has discovered and invented many things to alleviate pain and cure terrible diseases. These discoveries have enabled man to live a longer and healthier life.

Science has also helped man in increasing food production and other necessary things of life and sending them quickly to distant places of shortage or natural calamities. But, on the other hand, science has also discovered and invented many things which have been used as instruments of large-scale destruction of life and property. But it is not the scientists but we who are responsible for this misuse of scientific discoveries and inventions.

(129 Words)

Precis—Exercises for Practice

(6)

Make a Precis of the following passage and give it a suitable title. The Precis should be about *one-third* of the length of the passage :—

Education in our country today has become entirely meaningless, even harmful. It is distressing to find that during all these years of our Independence we have been merely dabbling in schemes and projects, in new-fangled ideas mostly borrowed from the West; merely setting up Commission after Commission at the cost of lakhs of rupees, and let the matter rest at that. The drive, the initiative, the dynamic vision necessary for radical reforms in the sphere of education are lamentably conspicuous by their absence. We have allowed matters to drift aimlessly, instead of settling down to grapple with momentous issues. The result has been disastrous. A lifeless, mechanical system of teaching in overcrowded schools and colleges imposed by far from competent teachers on students whose only interest is to get through the examinations, has been the bane of our education. We have completely forgotten the simple yet vital truth that the aim of education is first to build up character in the widest sense, and then to impart knowledge.

(172 Words)

Aids

Central Idea—Education in our country is meaningless. Commission after commission has

been set up since independence but no definite education policy has been evolved. Education has remained the same lifeless, mechanical and useless process which has done more harm than good to our growing generations. It has failed to mould their character.

Vocabulary :

Distressing	: painful.
Dabbling	: playing with.
New-fangled	: far-fetched.
Rest at that	: remain at the same stage.
Drive	: dashing spirit; the spirit to go forward.
Initiative	: courage and confidence; spirit to act.
Dynamic	: active and energetic.
Radical	: basic and revolutionary.
Lamentably	: regrettably.
Conspicuous	: lacking, wanting.
Grapple	: to fight with.
Bane	: curse.

(7)

Make a Precis of the following passage in about *one-third* of its length and give it a suitable title—

To picture to ourselves something of the wider life that unity would open to men, is a very attractive speculation. Life will certainly go with a stronger pulse; it will breathe a deeper breath, because it will have dispelled and conquered a hundred infections of the body and mind that now reduce it to invalidism and squalor. We have already laid stress on the vast elimination of drudgery from human life through the creation of a new race of slaves—the machines. This and the disappearance of the war and the smoothing out of endless restraints and contentions by juster social and economic arrangements, will lift the burden of toilsome work and routine work that has been the price of human security since the dawn of the first civilization from the shoulders of our children. This does not mean that they will cease to work, but they will cease to do irksome work under pressure and will work freely, planning, making, creating according to their gifts and instincts. They will fight nature no longer as dull conscripts of the pick and plough, but for a splendid conquest. Only the spiritlessness of our present

depression blinds us to the clear intimations of our reason that in the course of a few generations every little country town could become an Athens, every human being could be gentle in breeding and healthy in body and mind, the whole solid earth man's mine and its uttermost regions his playground. (244 Words)

Aids

Central Idea—World unity will bring many great advantages. Life will become happier and more secure on account of the elimination of fear of war and mental tension. With the introduction of machinery man will be relieved of the drudgery of monotonous and hard physical labour. The constant pressure of depression and discontent will be lifted and the whole world will become man's own home.

Vocabulary :

Speculation	: vision; dream.
Pulse	: zest for life.
Invalidism	: ailment, disease.
Squalor	: drudgery.
Elimination	: withdrawal, ending.
Race of slave	: machines will serve as a new generation of slaves.
Contentions	: conflicts.
Cease	: stop.
Instincts	: natural inclination.
Breeding	: upbringing.

(8)

Make a Precis of the following passage and give it a suitable title :—

Broken friendship, like china, may be repaired, but the break will always show. Friendship is a precious thing—too precious a treasure to be carelessly broken or thrown away. The world handles the word “friend” lightly; its real, true, deeper meaning is forgotten, and the acquaintance of an hour or the chancecomer is designated by the term which in itself bears a wealth of meaning. Your friend is the one who appreciates your faults as well as your virtues; who understands and sympathises with your defeats and victories, your aims and ideas, your joys and temptations, your hopes and disappointments, as no one else does or can. It is your friend to whom you turn for counsel, for comfort, for praise; he may not be as learned as some or as wise as others, but it

suffices that he understands you, and even his quite listening gives strength and renewed courage.

Blessed is the man or woman into whose life has come the beauty and power of such a friendship. Prize it well. Do all in your power to keep such a friendship unbroken. Avoid the break, for when it comes it cannot be mended and the jarring note mars the harmony. It is not alone a question of forgiveness that may be full and complete. It is the hurt in the heart that will not readily heal and the confidence that will not fully come back. (241 Words)

Aids

Central Idea—True friendship is a precious thing but very rare. Friendship is not the same thing as a casual acquaintance or a chance meeting. A true friend is one who fully understands and appreciates your strong as well as weak points and who stands by you through all phases of life whether dark or bright. True friendship should never be hurt or broken for thereafter it can never be restored to its normal glamour.

Vocabulary :

China	: utensils made of China clay.
Designated	: called; termed.
Temptations	: weaknesses.
Suffices	: is sufficient.
Prize	: value, place high.
Mended	: repaired.
Jarring	: unpleasant.

(9)

Make a Precis of the following passage and suggest a suitable title for it :—

For better or for worse, we are living in a society which is based physically on Western science and technology. This has inescapable consequences for the scientist. Initially he was an accidental force in the unfolding of human destiny. This he can no longer be. As Neils Bohr has said, scientists must become conscious of the fact that they are not merely observers, but also actors on the stage of life. The everyday world is crowding upon us; science is only a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Science is not enough. Chemistry is not enough. Scientists must live and even chemists must eat. Modern societies are preoccupied with efforts to improve their

material conditions and they are doing this under such intense competition that the less efficient will either fall behind or go to the wall. The means which are used depend on the application of scientific knowledge. Only scientists have the necessary training for establishing and using the technologies required to exploit recent major discoveries and those likely to arise in the future. It is clear that they will be brought more and more into technology, and thus into industry, the vehicle by which mankind exploits science for his own ends. It is certain that modern society will be forced to deploy its scientists in a manner conducive to fulfilling its objectives. Moreover, since the scientist is a part of society, he will be impelled to respond to the needs of the times and assume a wider role. **(258 Words)**

Aids

Central Idea—Scientists have to play a vital role in society. They cannot shake off their obligations and responsibility to mankind. They cannot remain passive spectators. The scientific discoveries and inventions must be applied to the promotion of human welfare.

Vocabulary :

Inescapable	: from which escape is not possible.
Initially	: in the beginning.
Unfolding	: opening.
Crowding	: collectively depending.
Preoccupied	: engaged.
Go to the wall	: lost, forgotten.
Vehicle	: means.
Exploits	: uses.
Ends	: objective, purpose.
Deploy	: use.
Conducive	: useful, beneficial.

(10)

Make a Precis of the following passage and give it a suitable title :—

Friendship is above reason, for, though you find virtues in a friend, he was your friend before you found them. It is a gift that we offer because we must; to give it as the reward of virtue would be to set a price upon it and those who do that have no friendship to give. If you choose your

friends on the ground that you are virtuous and want virtuous company, you are no nearer to true friendship than if you choose them for commercial reasons. Besides, who are you that you should be setting a price upon your friendship ? It is enough for any man that he has the divine power of making friends, and he must leave it to that power to determine who his friends shall be. For, though you may choose the virtuous to be your friends, they may not choose you; indeed, friendship cannot grow where there is any calculated choice. It comes like sleep, when you are not thinking about it; and you should be grateful, without any misgiving, when it comes.

So no man who knows what friendship is ever gave up a friend because he turns out to be disreputable. His only reason for giving up a friend is that he has ceased to care for him; and, when that happens he should reproach himself for this moral poverty of affection, not the friend for having proved unworthy. For it is inhuman presumption to say of any woman, when you have fallen out of love with her, that she is unworthy of your love. In friendship and in love we are always humble, because we see that a free gift has been given to us : and to lose that humility because we have lost friendship or love is to take a pride in what should shame us. **(308 Words)**

Aids

Central Idea—True friendship is not governed by any personal gain on either side. Friendship grows unconsciously and automatically. A virtuous man seeking to make friendship with another virtuous man is wrong logic. Friendship cannot grow on such calculations. Friendship is a divine gift and it must be accepted as such. It is as natural and divine as love.

Vocabulary :

Commercial reasons	: material gains.
Divine power	: heavenly boon.
Calculated choice	: choosing a friend through such logic.
Misgiving	: doubt or fear.
Disreputable	: dishonourable.
Reproach	: blame.