



Reading and Summarizing a Paragraph

A summary is a short retelling of a longer written passage, containing the author's most important ideas. Summarizing helps improve both your reading and writing skills. To summarize, you must read a passage closely, finding the main ideas and supporting ideas. Then you must briefly write down those ideas in a few sentences or a paragraph.

It is important to understand the difference between a summary and a paraphrase. A paraphrase is simply a rewriting of a passage in your own words. A summary, on the other hand, contains only the main idea and the supporting ideas of a passage. A summary will be much shorter than a paraphrase.

How to Summarize a Paragraph

1. Preview and read. Preview and read the paragraph closely. You probably will find that you need to read the paragraph more than one time.
2. Make a list or outline. Determine the main idea and the supporting details of the paragraph. Make a list or outline of these ideas. Be sure to use your own words.
3. Write a summary. Using your list, write a summary of the paragraph. State the main ideas, followed by important ideas. Limit your summary to just one or two sentences.
4. Read aloud and correct. Read the summary aloud, correcting any mistakes.

Sample Summary

"The Northern Lights"

There are times when the night sky glows with bands of color. The bands may begin as cloud shapes and then spread into a great arc across the entire sky. They may fall in folds like a curtain drawn across the heavens. The lights usually grow brighter, then suddenly dim. During this time the sky glows with pale yellow, pink, green, violet, blue, and red. These lights are called the Aurora Borealis. Some people call them the Northern Lights. Scientists have been watching them for hundreds of years. They are not quite sure what causes them. In ancient times people were



afraid of the Lights. They imagined that they saw fiery dragons in the sky. Some even concluded that the heavens were on fire.

Summary:

The Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, are bands of color in the night sky. Ancient people thought that these lights were dragon on fire, and even modern scientists are not sure what they are.

Directions: Read each passage and on a separate sheet of paper...

1. Create a title for the passage related to the main idea.
2. Accurately summarize the text.
3. Your summary must describe all key ideas from the text.
4. Do **not** include opinions or personal info in your summary.
5. Highlight or underline key ideas in each passage.

PRECIS WRITING

A Précis is like a miniature portrait of the passage: it retains the absolute essential points accompanied with the mood and tone of the author of the passage. The one aspect that needs to be taken care of is that one should not add one's subjective interpretation or comments to the précis and should try to retain the original author's voice and opinions. As far as the writing style is concerned, the writing should be clear with effective sentences (no rambling) and diction should be flawless. Ultimately, it is the coherence of the views presented in the précis that matters, and this can be achieved by making sure that one is concise and to the point. Unnecessarily long sentences should be avoided and the transition from one point to another should be smooth and consistent. Finally, the précis should make sense and be logical in its content and presentation.

The following are some of things that should '**not**' be a part of or a reflection of the précis:



- Simply a summary of a passage.
- Simply an abstract of a passage.
- An outline of a passage.
- A mere selection of a few important sentences from a passage.
- A collection of disconnected facts and statements.

Do's and Dont's of Précis Writing

- **Do's in a précis:**
 - Start your précis by highlighting the main idea of the passage and you should create contextual environment where you can place the necessary points.
 - Once the main idea is established in the précis, you can present the methods, points, facts etc. used by the author of the passage.
 - Compress and clarify a lengthy passage, article, or book, while retaining important concepts, key words, and important data.
 - Remove what is superfluous and retain the core essence of the work.
 - Always remember that mentions about history should be advisably done in the past tense.
 - State the purpose of the research or piece of writing (why was it important to conduct this research or write on this topic?)
- **Don'ts in a précis:**
 - Do not express your own opinion, wish, remark or criticism.
 - Do not insert any question in your précis. Its significance, if essential, may be expressed by a statement.
 - Do not use abbreviations or contractions.
 - Do not be shaky. This suggests that most probably, you have not understood the sense of the passage properly.

Sample Passage:

There is an enemy beneath our feet - an enemy more deadly for his complete impartiality. He recognizes 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 it is possible that 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, 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 destroyed entirely and 450 killed. 1970: Peru: 50,000 killed. In 1968 an earthquake struck Alaska. As this is a relatively under populated 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 of the property. (330 Words)'

Based on the above paragraph, we arrive at the following theme sentences for the four paragraphs:

- Earthquake - the deadly enemy of mankind.
- Damage caused by an earthquake in general.
- Damage caused by an earthquake-in particular,
- What can the scientists do?

The above four theme sentences can be developed into the following outline:

- **Earthquake - the deadly enemy of mankind.**



- Earthquake strikes all without a distinction of national boundary or political affiliation.
- The power of a quake is greater than that of a man-made weapon of destruction.
- Scientists are trying to find out means to combat earthquakes; they will find some way to protect themselves from earthquakes.
- **Damage caused by an earthquake in general:**
 - Strikes without warning.
 - Modern city when struck reduced to a primitive village.
- **Damage caused by an earthquake in particular.**
 - Quake strikes plains, seas and mountains causing all round destruction.
 - In 1755, Lisbon destroyed, 450 killed.
 - In 1970, Peru struck, 50,000 killed.
- **What can the scientists do?**
 - In 1968, Alaska hit, subcontinent moved 80 feet into the Pacific Ocean.
 - Scientists cannot resist the powerful earthquake.
 - They can predict the place of origin of the quake so that precaution can be taken to save man & property.

Based on the above outline, we can make the following rough draft:

- **Earthquake- The Great Destroyer**

Earthquake is the deadly enemy of mankind. Earthquake strikes all without a distinction of nationality or political affiliation. The power of a quake is greater than that of any man-made weapon of destruction. An earthquake strikes mankind without a warning. A modern city when struck is reduced to rubble. A quake strikes plains, seas and mountains causing all round destruction. The quake struck Lisbon in 1755 killing 450; Peru in 1970 killing 50,000; Alaska in 1968 moving it 80 feet into the Pacific Ocean. Scientists are trying to find out means to combat earthquakes and they are able to predict at least where the earthquake will hit so that precaution



can be taken to save man and property from destruction. As the number of words in the rough draft is more than required we shall have to reduce it further without reducing the ideas.

THE FINAL DRAFT WOULD LOOK AS FOLLOWS:

Earthquake - The Great Destroyer

Earthquake is the mankind's deadly enemy. Earthquake strikes all without a distinction of nationality or political affiliation. The power of a quake is greater than that of any man-made weapon of destruction. An earthquake strikes mankind without a warning. A modern city when struck is reduced -to a nibble. A quake strikes plains, seas and mountains causing all round destruction. The quake struck Lisbon in 1755 killing 450; Peru in 1970 killing 50,000; Alaska in 1968 moving it 80 feet into the Pacific Ocean. Scientists are trying to find out means to combat earthquakes, to predict the origin of the quake so that precaution can be taken to save man and property from destruction. (115 words)