

GENERAL HINTS ON PRECIS WRITING

1. When a list of things is given in the original, a general word should be used to express the idea

for example: " There were dogs,cats,hens,ducks,geese and pigs barking,squealing,crowing,quacking and growling all over the farmyard."
In compressing this,we shall convey the idea in the following manner:
Different animals and birds were makingg various noises over the farmyard.

The number of words used here is more than one-third of the original,but that is because the original passage is too short to allow a precis one-third in length.This is only an illustration to convey the technique.

Now take the following sentence:

"Carpenters,blacksmiths,tailors,shoemakers and those engaged in similar other trades had assembled there to voice grievances and to seek redress."

This may be shortened as follows:

Artisans of various kinds had gathered there to seek the redress of their grievances.

2. It is useful to learn one-word substitutions,that is,single words which convey the meaning expressed in a group of words.

For instance:"They arrived at the same time"may be written in a precis as "they arrived simultaneously".

A couple of more examples may be added here.

For instance:"you are liable to be called upon to explain your action".
Shortened form : "you are answerable for your action".

For example:"you have many weaknesses.One of them is that u easily believe what people tell u and that u dont verify the facts"

Shortened form : "One of your weaknesses is that you are too credulous"

3. Among the rules given above,it has been said (rule 5) that figurative language should be changed into a simple and direct expression.

Here is example:

"I have grown to feel that the ambition which we preach and the success for which we prepare are very often nothing but a missing of the simple road,a troubled wandering among thorny bypaths and dark mountains".

Here the second part of the sentence is written in a figurative style.That is,"road","thorny bypaths" and "dark mountains" are not used in their literal sense.So while shortening it we have to use simple words in place of the figurative

language. We may write as follows:

" I feel that the ambition and the success which we aim at often take us away from the right path and involve us in difficulties".

But we must not forget rule 10 also. We must not use the first person pronoun. The correct way of writing, therefore, would be:

"The author`s feeling is that the ambition and the success which people aim at often take them away from the right path and involve them in difficulties".

Here is another example of the use of figurative language:

"And then he came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths, like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes, like a whirlwind that upset many things but most of all the working people`s minds".

In this passage the word "fresh air", "stretch ourselves and take deep breaths", "a beam of light.....darkness", "scales", "like a whirlwind" are all used in a figurative sense.

We can simplify and condense this passage in the following manner:

"And then he came, He was a powerful enlightening influence. He changed people`s thinking and made them progressive".

4. Sometimes a writer may have written several sentences which can be compressed into one.

for instance: "Truthfulness is an important quality of greatness. Honesty is a requisite of greatness. Purity of character, too, is expected in a great man. Initiative and a spirit of enterprise are other qualities which we look for in a great man".

This passage may be compressed as follows:

"Truthfulness, honesty, purity of character, initiative and a spirit of enterprise are essential qualities of greatness"

5. Now we take a few examples of unnecessary matter which has to be eliminated from a passage. Consider the following passage.

For instance: "Finally, a word about what a national language spoken, written and thought might do for the theatre in Pakistan. With the new awakening in social life, the need for the common tongue is being increasingly felt. Much work is being done to hammer out a common linguistic medium. The day when it is accepted will be a great day for the Pakistani theatre, as it will be for all art in the country. But the theatre, because its life blood is the spoken word, will gain most".

Here the subject is the relationship between the theatre in Pakistan and a common language for the whole country. The writer wishes to point out that the theatre will gain very much if a common spoken and written language is accepted by the whole country. The second and third sentences in the passage above may, therefore, be completely ignored in writing the precis while the rest of the passage may be compressed as follows:

"A national language, spoken and written, can greatly benefit the theatre in Pakistan. The acceptance of a common language by the country will, therefore, be a great day for the theatre".

Now take the following passage:

"We are told by some ancient authors that Socrates was instructed in eloquence by a woman. I have indeed very often looked upon that art as the most proper for the female sex and I think the universities would do well to consider whether they should not fill the rhetoric chairs with she-professors. It has been said in the praise of some men that they could talk whole hours together upon anything, but it must be owned to the honour of the other sex, that there are many among them who can talk whole hours together upon nothing".

Here the first sentence may be completely ignored as it merely serves to introduce the main idea of the paragraph. The student should not think that, because Socrates was a great philosopher, the name of Socrates must be brought into the precis. Again, the suggestion that she-professors should fill the chairs of rhetoric in universities need not be brought into the precis, as it is merely an illustration. The main idea of the paragraph is women's capacity for talking for long hours even when they have nothing worth while to talk about. There is also a comparison between men and women in this connection. Accordingly, we can shorten the passage given above in the following manner:

"The author regards eloquence in speech-making as an art which belongs chiefly to women. They have a greater capacity than men for talking. They can talk for hours together even when they have nothing to talk about".