

Summarising

Chapter 13, Hornbill, Writing Skills section. In the printed book this is the second writing skill, right after Note-making. It builds on note-making, so both skills are often tested together in the same paper.

Summarising and note-making: how they differ

Summarising follows note-making. The purpose of note-making is usually for one's own personal reference. If the main points are to be reported to someone else, we present a summary instead.

Key line to remember: a summary is not as severely shortened as a set of notes. Notes can be very short phrases. A summary must read as connected prose.

So the two skills share a starting point but end differently. Note-making ends in short, abridged points for yourself. Summarising ends in full sentences meant for a reader.

What is summarising

Summarising is the selection and paraphrasing of all important information of the original source. This is done by analysing the paragraphs or the passage in order to formulate a plan of writing.

In short: read closely, decide what matters, put it in your own words, and organise those words into a plan before you write the final summary.

Steps shared with note-making

The process of summarising involves the same steps followed in note-making. These three steps come first, before any summarising begins.

- Underlining* important ideas as you read the passage.
- Writing them down, abridging the verbs.
- Avoiding examples, explanations and repetition.

In note-making we ~~expand~~ abridge the verbs into short phrases.

Where summarising takes a different path

Instead of nominalising the points, that is changing verbs into nouns, we do the opposite. We expand the points into full sentences and link them using suitable connectors.

We need to be precise in our expression. The summary will contain all the main ideas of the original passage. Practice in using one word for many will help a great deal.

Definition box: Note-making shortens ideas into abbreviated points for yourself. Summarising expands those same points back into full, linked sentences for a reader.

One word for many: worked lines

The book gives two short examples of turning a long idea

into one precise word or phrase. Learn both by heart, they are asked directly in exams.

Children who show intelligence far beyond their age often turn out to be mediocre in adult life. In one word: Precocious - children often turn out to be mediocre in adult life.

Her genius was marked by excellence in the various arts, languages and science. In one phrase: She was a versatile genius.

Notice the pattern. A long descriptive sentence is replaced by a single well-chosen word, precocious, versatile, without losing the meaning. This is the heart of paraphrasing.

The technique: what to select

Summarising is not copying out sentences you like. It is a skill of selection. Read each paragraph and ask what one idea it is built around.

- Find the main idea of every paragraph before you write

anything.

- Select only the information that supports that main idea.
- Paraphrase it, put it in your own words, do not lift full lines.
- Cut redundant detail: examples, explanations, and repeated points.
- Keep the logical order of the original passage while you link ideas with connectors.
- Watch the word limit throughout, do not write freely and cut later.

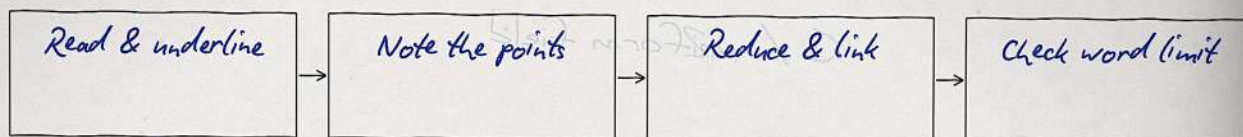
A summary should be about ~~half~~ one-third the length of the original passage.

Step-by-step process NCERT teaches

Put together, the passage gives one continuous method.

Follow it in order every time you are asked to summarise a passage.

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- Read the passage once for overall meaning before marking anything.
- Read again and underline important words and ideas as you go along.
- Note down the important points, this stage looks like your note-making work.
- Look at the points and decide what can be omitted to make the summary shorter.*
- Expand the remaining points into full sentences, linked with connectors such as and, though, because, which.
- Count the words and trim until the summary is close to the target length.

Worked example: the soybean passage

The book gives one full worked example, done in stages. Study it stage by stage, it shows exactly how a passage shrinks from 225 words to 74 words without losing its main ideas.

Read the passage below first, the way the book asks, underlining important words as you go along.

Original passage (225 words)

Soybeans belong to the legume family. The beans are the seeds of the leguminous soybean plant. They can be grown on a variety of soils and in a wide range of climates.

Soybeans are versatile as they can be used as whole beans, soy sprouts, or processed as a variety of food items, such as soy milk, tofu, tempeh, textured vegetable protein, miso, soy sauce, soy oil and margarine, and soy dairy alternatives. They are also used for making candles and bio-diesel.

Soy is an excellent source of high quality protein, is low in

saturated fats and is cholesterol-free. It is also rich in vitamins, especially Vitamin B complex, minerals such as magnesium, calcium, iron, potassium and copper, and also fibres.

The passage says LDL is a good bad cholesterol that soy helps lower.

In recent times it has been highly recommended because of its ability to lower the levels of Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL), a bad* cholesterol. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has confirmed that foods containing soy protein are likely to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

An easy way to take soy is as soymilk, now available with added flavour. Soymilk does not contain lactose (milk sugar) and can be drunk by those who are allergic to normal milk. To get soymilk, soybeans are soaked in water, ground and then strained. If you do not mind the trouble, you can also make it at home.

Stage 1: important points noted (111 words)

This is the note-making stage. Notice these points are already shorter, but still written as short lines, not yet full connected prose.

- Soybeans are the seeds of the soybean plant of the legume family.
- They grow in a variety of soils and climates.
- They can be used in various forms: beans, sprouts and a variety of food items.
- They are also used to make candles and bio-diesel.
- They are a source of high quality protein, vitamins, minerals and fibres. They are low in fat content and cholesterol. They can lower LDL levels and reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.
- Soymilk, lactose-free, is available as flavoured milk and can be drunk by those allergic to ordinary milk, and can also be made at home by soaking the beans, grinding them and straining the water.

Stage 2: first reduction (90 words)

Soy milk does not contain ~~protein~~ lactose, so people allergic to milk can drink it.

The soybean leguminous plant, which grows in all kinds of soil and climate, yields beans, sprouts and a variety of processed food items and dairy alternatives, and is also used to make candles and bio-diesel.

Rich in protein, vitamins, minerals and fibres, it has a low fat and cholesterol content. It lowers LDL levels and reduces the risk of coronary heart disease.

Soy milk, which is lactose-free, is available as flavoured milk and agrees with people allergic to ordinary milk. It can be made at home by soaking, grinding and straining soybean.

This is about half the original length. Once you can write a summary at this stage, the next task is to trim it further without losing any main idea.

Stage 3: final summary (about 72 to 74 words)

Soybean, a legume, growing in a variety of soil and climatic conditions, yields beans, sprouts and a variety of food items, and is used in making candles and bio-diesel.

Rich in protein, vitamins, minerals and fibres, it is low in cholesterol and fat. It lowers LDL levels and reduces the risk of coronary heart disease. Soymilk, lactose-free, is available flavoured and taken by people allergic to milk. It can also be made at home.

Word count box: original 225 words, notes stage III words, first reduction 90 words, final summary about 74 words.

Techniques used to shrink the summary

The book points out exactly what made the last stage shorter. Learn these tricks, they are reusable on any passage you are given.

- Phrases in apposition: a legume, set off between commas, adds information without a new clause.
- Present participles: growing, used to compress a longer clause into one word.
- Dropped opening phrases: it is rich in becomes simply rich in, and the main verb is moved later in the sentence.
- Almost all the main points are still covered, only the wording is tighter. *

Almost all the main points have been covered even in the shortest version. That is the real test of a good summary: no key fact is missing, only the extra words are gone.

Word limit discipline

A summary is usually one-third the length of the original passage. The soybean example actually goes further, down to about one-third and then a little beyond, which shows how much a paragraph can be trimmed once you know its main ideas.

- Always check the word limit given in the question before you start writing your final version.
- Draft first, then count words, then cut connecting words and repeated ideas until you reach the limit.
- Never sacrifice a main idea just to save a few words, cut explanation and examples first.

Common mistakes students make

- Copying full sentences from the passage instead of paraphrasing them in your own words.
- Including examples and explanations that the main idea does not need.
- Writing note-making style short phrases instead of full, linked sentences.
- Forgetting connectors, so the summary reads as a list, not as connected prose.
- Missing the word limit by a wide margin either far too long or far too short.
- Changing the meaning of the passage while shortening it, always check your summary still says what the original said.

Before you submit any summary, read it once as a stranger would. Does it make sense without the original passage next to it? If yes, it is doing its job.

NCERT exercise: Green Sahara

The chapter's practice passage is called Green Sahara: The Great Desert Where Hippos Once Wallowed. The instruction given in the book is simple: read the text below and summarise it.

Apply the same method here. Read once for meaning, read again underlining important words, note the points, then write a linked summary within your word limit.

Green Sahara: the passage, part 1

The Sahara sets a standard for dry land. It is the world's largest desert. Relative humidity can drop into the low single digits. There are places where it rains only about once

a century. There are people who reach the end of their lives without ever seeing water come from the sky.

Yet beneath the Sahara are vast aquifers of fresh water, enough liquid to fill a small sea. It is fossil water, a treasure laid down in prehistoric times, some of it possibly a million years old. Just 6,000 years ago, the Sahara was a much different place.

It was green. Prehistoric rock art in the Sahara shows something surprising: hippopotamuses, which need year-round water.

We don't have much evidence of a tropical paradise out there, but we had something perfectly liveable, says Jennifer Smith, a geologist at Washington University in St Louis.

Green Sahara: the passage, part 2

The green Sahara was the product of the migration of the paleo-monsoon. In the same way that ice ages come and go,

so too do monsoons migrate north and south. The dynamics of earth's motion are responsible.

The tilt of the earth's axis varies in a regular cycle: sometimes the planet is more tilted towards the sun, sometimes less so. The axis also wobbles like a spinning top. The date of the earth's perihelion, its closest approach to the sun, varies in a cycle as well.

At times when the Northern Hemisphere tilts sharply towards the sun and the planet makes its closest approach the increased blast of sunlight during the north's summer months can cause the African monsoon, which currently occurs between the Equator and roughly 17 degrees north latitude, to shift north as it did 10,000 years^{*} ago, inundating North Africa.

Green Sahara: the passage, part 3

Around 5,000 years ago the monsoon shifted dramatically southward again. The prehistoric inhabitants

of the Sahara discovered that their relatively green surroundings were undergoing something worse than a drought, and perhaps they migrated towards the Nile Valley, where Egyptian culture began to flourish at around the same time.

- We're learning, and only in recent years, that some climate changes in the past have been as rapid as anything underway today, says Robert Giegengack, a University of Pennsylvania geologist.

As the land dried out and vegetation decreased, the soil lost its ability to hold water when it did rain. Fewer clouds formed from evaporation. When it rained, the water washed away and evaporated quickly. There was a kind of runaway drying effect. By 4,000 years ago the Sahara had become what it is today.

Green Sahara: the passage, part 4

No one knows how human-driven climate change may alter the Sahara in the future. It is something scientists can

ponder while sipping bottled fossil water pumped from underground.

It's the best water in Egypt, Giegengack said: clean, refreshing mineral water. If you want to drink something good, try the ancient buried treasure of the Sahara.

Joel Achenback, Staff Writer, Washington Post.

Practice guidance for Green Sahara

Use the same three-stage method you practised on the soybean passage. Do not try to write the final summary in one go.

- Stage 1: read and underline. Mark facts about the desert, the old wet climate, why it changed, and today's uncertainty about the future.
- Stage 2: note down points for each idea block, geography and humidity, the fossil water, the green past, the monsoon shift, the drying process, the uncertain future.

- Stage 3: expand those points into full linked sentences, keep the same order the passage follows, and check your word count against the limit given.

A useful check for this passage: your summary should still explain why the Sahara turned from green to dry, since that cause and effect is the passage's main idea.

How examiners score a summary

Board answer sheets usually give separate marks for content and for expression. Content marks reward the main ideas you kept, expression marks reward how well you linked them into prose.

- Content: every main idea from each paragraph should appear somewhere in your summary.
- Expression: sentences should read smoothly, with connectors, not as a string of short notes.
- Word limit: examiners check this directly, going far over or under the limit costs marks.

- A suitable title is often asked for separately, keep it short and drawn from the main idea of the whole passage.

A title for the soybean passage could simply be Soybean: A Versatile Food. A title for Green Sahara could be The Sahara's Green Past. Keep titles to a few words, not a sentence.

One more short drill

Practise the one-word-for-many habit on your own sentences before the exam. It saves words fast and it is exactly what examiners look for in strong summaries.

- A person who eats very little food: an abstemious person.
- Writing that can be read in more than one way: an ambiguous passage.
- A person who loves and studies books: a bibliophile.
- Words that sound alike but mean different things: homophones.

Build a small personal list like this as you revise. On exam day, reach for the shortest accurate word before you reach for a long descriptive phrase.

Useful connecting words for linking points

The chapter asks you to link points using suitable connectors once you expand them into full sentences. Keep a small stock of these ready.

- To add a point: and, also, besides, in addition.
- To show cause and effect: because, so, as a result, which causes.
- To contrast two ideas: but, though, however, while.
- To show sequence: first, then, after this, finally.
- To give a reason briefly: due to, owing to, since.

Use one connector at a time. Chaining too many in one sentence makes the summary hard to follow, which defeats the purpose of summarising in the first place.

Self-check before you submit

Run through this short checklist once your summary is written. It takes under a minute and catches most of the common mistakes listed earlier.

- Have I underlined and noted points before writing, or did I write straight away.
- Is every sentence a full sentence, not a note-making style phrase.
- Have I paraphrased, or are whole lines copied from the passage.
- Does the order of ideas match the order in the original passage.
- Is my word count close to one-third of the original, or the limit given in the question.
- Have I given a short, suitable title if the question asks for one.

Quick recall before the exam

- Summarising follows note-making, but a summary is full connected prose, not short notes.

- Definition: selection and paraphrasing of important information, written after analysing the passage.
- Shared first steps: underline, note down, avoid examples and repetition.
- The one difference that matters most: expand points into full sentences, linked with connectors, instead of nominalising them.
- Target length: about one-third of the original passage.
- Useful tools: apposition phrases, present participles, and moving the main verb later in the sentence.

Practise on one fresh passage a week. Time yourself: read, underline, note points, then write the linked summary within the word limit given in the question.