

Sub-titling

Chapter 14 on our list, but this is the third piece in the Writing Skills section of Hornbill. In the printed book it restarts as Chapter 3 of Writing Skills, right after Note-making and Summarising.

What is sub-titling

The purpose of sub-titling is to convey the main idea or theme of each section of a long piece of writing.

Sub-title = short heading for one section's main idea

It helps the reader know at a glance the sub-topics that are being addressed. Giving suitable sub-titles helps break the monotony of reading long passages.

Why sub-titling matters

- ① It conveys the main idea or theme of each section of a

long piece of writing.

- ② It helps the reader know at a glance the sub-topics that are being addressed.
- ③ It helps break the monotony of reading long, unbroken passages of text.

Think of sub-titles as signposts. A reader scanning the page should be able to tell what each block is about without reading every line first.

A sub-title is a ~~summary~~ short heading, not a summary of the section.

How to spot a natural section break

A passage does not announce its own sections. You have to read closely and notice where the focus of the writing shifts.

- The topic or focus changes, even if the general subject stays the same.
- A new example, city, statistic or case study is introduced.
- The writing moves from describing a problem to describing a solution.

- The argument moves from local detail to a wider, general point, or the other way round.
- A new paragraph opens with a transition word or phrase, such as however, in another, or the practice has been different.

Mark these shift points lightly in pencil first. Only once you can see the whole passage broken into blocks should you start writing the actual sub-titles.

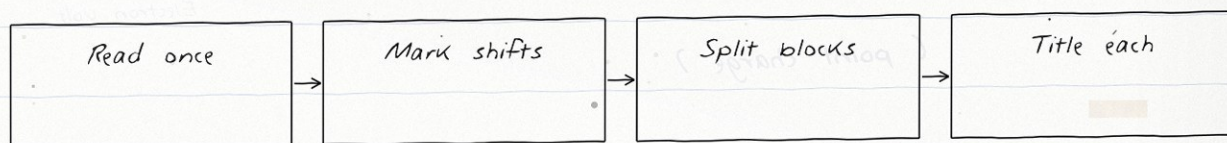
Framing a good sub-title

- Keep it short: a phrase of two to five words, not a full sentence.
- Make it a noun phrase that names the topic of the block, such as Urban Decay, not a sentence describing it.
- Base it on the main idea of the whole block, not just its first line.
- Do not end it with a full stop, it should read like a heading.
- Avoid vague titles such as Introduction or More Details, name the actual idea instead.

Weak sub-title: Some Problems In Cities Today. Strong sub-title: Urban Decay. The strong version is shorter and names the exact idea of the block.

Step-by-step method NCERT teaches

Put together, the chapter's instructions give one continuous method for sub-titling any long passage.



- ① Read the whole piece once, right through, before marking anything.
- ② Notice any italicised or highlighted line placed at the top, it usually tells you the theme of the whole piece at a glance.
- ③ Read the piece again and underline or mark every point where the sub-topic shifts.
- ④ Divide the piece into sections at these shift points.
- ⑤ Write one short phrase for each section that names its main idea, not a sentence.

- ⑥ Check that your sub-titles, read one after another, follow the same logical order as the passage itself.

Write the sub-titles ~~before~~ after you have read the whole passage once.

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The NCERT activity: instructions

Read the newspaper article given below and do the tasks that follow.

An italicised line is placed at the top of the article, just under its title. Notice it first, this single sentence tells us at a glance what the whole article is about.

The example of Curitiba in Brazil, which has attracted global attention for innovative urban plans using low-cost technologies, shows that inclusive development models for urban renewal are workable.

The passage: A new deal for old cities

By G. Ananthakrishnan. First published in The Hindu, 13 December

2005.

Many cities in India accurately mirror Friedrich Engels' description of urban centres in nineteenth century England even today. Streets that are generally unpaved, rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters but supplied with foul, stagnant pools instead, wrote Engels on the living conditions of the working class in that country.

Urban Decay

(This sub-heading is the one example NCERT has already given us in the printed article.)

The depths of urban decay in India came to global notice during the pneumonic plague of 1994 in Surat; it epitomised the failure of governments in the post-Independence era and exposed development policies that ignored fundamental public health issues inherited from colonial rule.

There is little evidence to show that policymakers assimilated the lessons from the Surat public health

disaster. State and municipal governments did not pursue reform in waste management, though civic conditions in Surat itself underwent change in the plague aftermath. During the past decade, many cities pursued development agendas, often with the help of massive international loans, to project modernisation at the cost of basic civic reform.

There is thus a continuing challenge before the current mission to enable and also compel local governments to abide by the provisions of the Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules by which they are legally bound.

Post-liberalisation policies have tended to largely disregard other key factors that affect the quality of life in cities and towns: poverty, lack of sanitation, water shortages, gross undersupply of affordable housing, and traffic chaos generated by automobile dependence, in turn created by neglect of public transport.

In the absence of a hygienic environment and safe water supply, chronic water-borne diseases such as cholera and other communicable diseases continue to stalk the poor in the biggest cities.

It must be sobering to the affluent layers of the population that nearly 14 million Indian households (forming 26 per cent of the total) in the urban areas do not have a latrine within the house, as per the Census of India 2001; some 14 per cent have only rudimentary pit facilities. The number of households without a drainage connection stands at 11.8 million, representing 22.1 per cent of households. Migration to cities continues and infrastructure to treat sewage is grossly inadequate to meet the demand even where it exists.

It is unlikely that the quality of the urban environment can be dramatically improved therefore, if such fundamental questions remain unresolved.

Urban transport receives scant attention from policymakers. Policy distortions have led to rising automobile dependency, higher safety risks for road users, and land use plans that are based not on the needs of people, but primarily designed to facilitate use of private motorised vehicles.

It comes as no surprise therefore that pedestrians and bicycle riders, who form 30 to 70 per cent of peak

hour traffic in most urban centres, also make up a large proportion of fatalities in road accidents. A paper prepared by the Transport Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIIPP) of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, says pedestrian fatalities in Mumbai and Delhi were nearly 78 per cent and 53 per cent of the total, according to recent data, compared to 13 per cent and 12 per cent in Germany and the United States.

Such alarming death rates, and an equally high injury rate, should persuade policymakers to revisit* their urban planning strategies and correct the distortions. But many cities such as Chennai have actually done the reverse, reduced footpaths and areas for pedestrian use to facilitate unrestricted use of motorised vehicles.

The practice in progressive world cities has been different. Curitiba in Brazil, which has attracted global attention for innovative urban plans using low-cost technologies, has done everything that Indian policymakers would dread to do. Starting in the 1970s, this provincial centre, with the highest per capita ownership of cars in Brazil other than the capital at the time, banned automobiles from many crowded areas in favour of

pedestrians, built an internationally acknowledged bus system that reduced household commuting expenditure to below the national average, and created new housing areas that were provided transport links in a planned manner. Some of the prestigious land development in the city, including a new Opera House, came up in abandoned sites such as quarries.

The bus-way system cut riding time by a third, Scientific American noted in a review in the mid-1990s, by providing for advance ticketing, specially-designed boarding areas with wider doors for entry and exit, and dedicated lanes for faster transit.

In another low-cost initiative, Curitiba managed floods with a dedication that Mumbai, Bangalore, and Chennai can only marvel at. The city created large artificial lakes in suitable places that filled up in the monsoon, avoiding flooding of residential areas. In the summer, these lakes turned into parks to provide recreational spaces.

State administrations and urban planning bodies in India follow policies that, ironically, allow filling of existing wetlands by real estate lobbies, leading to

flooding. The residents then demand expensive new storm water drains.

Examples such as Curitiba show that inclusive development models for urban renewal are workable, if only the state and local governments can be persuaded to adopt a rights-based approach to affordable housing, sanitation, water supply, mobility and a clean environment, instead of a market-oriented model that lays excessive emphasis on recovery of costs incurred by profit-oriented private sector service provision. Support from a progressive middle class and trade unions is equally critical to bring about genuine urban renewal.

G. Ananthakrishnan. *The Hindu*, 13 December 2005.

Activity (from the textbook)

- ① Notice the italicised sentence placed at the top of the article which tells us at a glance what the article is about.
- ② Divide the article into four sections based on the shifts in the sub-topics and give a suitable sub-heading for each section. One has been done for you in the article as an example.

- ③ Look for pictures in newspapers and magazines that depict the urban civic problems discussed in the text. Cut them out and pin them to the text at appropriate places.

Sample solution: Four sections

The article already gives Urban Decay as the sub-heading for its opening block, right after the Engels comparison. Using the shift-in-topic method, the rest of the article splits naturally into three more blocks.



- ① Urban Decay, the given example: opens with the Surat plague of 1994, post-Independence failure, and post-liberalisation neglect of basic services.
- ② Sanitation and Water Crisis: the census data on missing latrines and drainage, and the water-borne disease burden on the urban poor.
- ③ Transport Neglect: scant policy attention to transport, the

TRIPP data on pedestrian fatalities, and cities like Chennai cutting footpaths.

- ④ Curitiba's Answer: the low-cost bus system, planned housing, flood-control lakes, and the closing call for a rights-based approach.

Notice the logic: problem history, then two separate problems (sanitation, transport), then one working solution and a conclusion. That is a natural four-part shape for this kind of civic-issue article.

The Curitiba example appears in ~~one~~ two different places in the article, so read past the first mention before you fix your section breaks.

Why these four breaks work

- Each break sits exactly where the topic changes: from history to sanitation, from sanitation to transport, from transport problem to transport solution.
- Every sub-title is a short noun phrase, not a sentence copied from the passage.
- Reading only the four sub-titles in order still tells you the shape of the whole argument.

- The one heading NCERT already gives, Urban Decay, is kept exactly as printed, since Task 2 says one has been done for you.

Sub-titling vs note-making vs summarising

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These three Writing Skills chapters test related but different habits, and boards like to mix them up in revision papers, so keep the difference clear.

- Note-making shortens a passage into abridged points, verbs cut down, meant for your own reference.
- Summarising expands those same points back into full, linked sentences, meant for a reader, usually about a third of the original length.
- Sub-titling does neither. The passage keeps its full original length. You only add a short heading above each section so a reader can find their way through it at a glance.

Sub-titling ~~shortens~~ labels a passage, it does not shorten it the way a summary does.

Reading the article closely: a walkthrough

Here is how the sample solution on the previous page was actually reached, using the same read, mark, split, title method taught earlier in this chapter.

- ① First read: the italicised line at the top already names the theme, inclusive, low-cost urban renewal, Curitiba as the model case.
- ② Second read: Urban Decay is already marked for us, so the next shift to look for begins where the topic moves away from history and policy failure.
- ③ That shift appears at In the absence of a hygienic environment and safe water supply, which turns the passage toward sanitation and water statistics.
- ④ The next shift appears at Urban transport receives scant attention from policymakers, which turns the passage toward traffic and pedestrian safety.
- ⑤ The last shift appears at The practice in progressive world cities has been different, which turns the passage toward Curitiba's actual solutions and the closing call to action.
- ⑥ Four shift points, including the one already given, produce exactly the four sections the activity asks for.

Notice that every shift is marked by a sentence that

either names a new problem or announces a change of direction. That is the single most reliable signal to look for in any passage.

Exam-style questions on sub-titling

Boards usually give an unseen prose or newspaper passage and ask you to divide it into a stated number of parts, giving a suitable heading for each. This is commonly worth four to five marks.

- Read the entire passage once before writing a single heading, half-read answers usually miss the real shifts.
- Match the exact number of sections the question asks for, neither more nor fewer.
- Keep all your headings in the same style, for example all short noun phrases, not a mix of phrases and full sentences.
- Do not copy a full sentence from the passage as a heading, reduce it to its main idea in your own words.
- Write headings clearly above the section they belong to, so the examiner can see exactly where each part starts.
- Watch your time, this question rewards a quick first read more than a slow, careful one.

Give exactly as many sub-titles as the passage's ~~paragraphs~~ question asks for.

Glossary from the passage

A few words from the Curitiba article are worth knowing cold, they turn up again in similar civic-issue passages.

- Pneumonic plague: a severe lung infection, the outbreak that exposed Surat's civic failures in 1994.
- Epitomised: stood as a perfect example of something.
- Assimilated: fully understood and absorbed, here used of lessons policymakers failed to learn.
- Disregard: to pay no attention to, to ignore.
- Rudimentary: very basic, only at an early or simple stage.
- Distortions: results that are twisted away from what is fair or correct, used here of poor policy choices.
- Provincial: belonging to a province, away from the capital city.
- Quarries: open pits dug out for stone, here reused as building sites in Curitiba.
- Ironically: in a way that is the opposite of what you would expect, used of policies that cause the very flooding they should prevent.

- Rights-based approach: a policy model that treats housing, water and sanitation as things citizens are entitled to, not as products to be sold at a profit.

Understanding this vocabulary helps you follow the argument fast on a single read, which is exactly what a sub-titling question demands.

Common mistakes students make

- Writing a full sentence ^{*} as a sub-title instead of a short phrase.
- Splitting the passage into too many tiny sections instead of the four natural blocks asked for.
- Copying the first few words of a paragraph as the heading, instead of naming its actual main idea.
- Missing a shift because two ideas share the same city name, such as the two Curitiba mentions in this article.
- Forgetting to read the italicised line at the top, which already states the article's central theme.
- Using vague headings like Point 1 or More Info that do not name anything specific.

Before you submit an answer, read only your four

sub-titles in a row, with no other text. If they do not read like a short outline of the article, revise them.

How to lay out the final answer

Examiners want to see the section breaks clearly, not just a list of headings at the end. Follow this layout.

- ① Copy or indicate the passage in your answer, breaking it at each shift point you have identified.
- ② Write the heading directly above the section it belongs to, underlined or in capitals so it stands out.
- ③ Keep the passage's own wording untouched below each heading, you are only adding labels, not rewriting the content.
- ④ If the question also asks for a title for the whole passage, give that separately at the very top, before the first section heading.

Format on the page: Title of the passage, then Heading 1, its portion of text, then Heading 2, its portion of text, and so on to the last section.

This layout alone often carries marks. An answer with

the right four headings but no clear section breaks on the page usually scores lower than a tidy, clearly divided one.

Practice guidance

Sub-titling is tested on unseen passages, so the method matters more than memorising this one article.

- ① Pick any long newspaper or magazine article, at least four paragraphs long.
- ② Read it once fully, then read again marking every topic shift.
- ③ Split it into three or four blocks and write one short phrase for each.
- ④ Cover your phrases and try to summarise the article from them alone, this checks whether they actually work as signposts.

In an exam, you get one clean read before the clock matters. Use it only to mark shifts in pencil, then write your final sub-titles on the second pass.

Self-practice checklist

Run through this checklist on your own answer before you call a sub-titling exercise finished.

- ① Did I read the whole passage once before marking any shift points?
- ② Does every heading name an idea instead of copying a full sentence?
- ③ Are all my headings short phrases, roughly the same length and style as each other?
- ④ Did I keep any heading the question already gave me exactly as printed?
- ⑤ Do my headings, read in order with nothing else, still tell the shape of the whole passage?
- ⑥ Did I give exactly the number of sections the question asked for, no more and no fewer?

Target: 3 to 5 sections is typical for exam passages

Keep this checklist in your revision file. It works on any unseen passage, not only on the Curitiba article used in this chapter.

Quick recall before the exam

- Definition: a sub-title conveys the main idea of one section, helps the reader navigate at a glance, and breaks monotony.
- Method: read once, mark shifts, split into blocks, title each block.*
- Good sub-title: two to five words, a noun phrase, no full stop.
- Always check the italicised or highlighted line at the top first, it usually names the whole theme.
- This chapter's practice article: A new deal for old cities, by G. Ananthakrishnan, The Hindu, four sections, one heading (Urban Decay) already given.*

Method: read, mark shifts, split, title each block

Revise this chapter alongside Note-making and Summarising. All three Writing Skills chapters reward the same habit: read closely before you write a single word.