

CREATING A PRÉCIS OR ABSTRACT

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2008

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WHAT IS PRÉCIS?

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- A PRÉCIS IS A SHORT SUMMARY, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN ONE-THIRD OR ONE-FOURTH AS LONG AS THE ORIGINAL PASSAGE.
- OFTEN, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO EDIT YOUR PRÉCIS TO A SPECIFIC NUMBER OF WORDS.

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WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT?

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- IN RESEARCH WRITING, AN ABSTRACT IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PAPER, AND IS USED BY THE READER TO QUICKLY ASCERTAIN THE PAPER'S PURPOSE.
- AN ABSTRACT ALWAYS APPEARS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PAPER, EVEN BEFORE THE ESSAY'S OUTLINE.
- IN OUR MAJOR RESEARCH ESSAYS, THE ABSTRACT APPEARS ON PAGE ONE (AFTER THE COVER PAGE AND BEFORE THE ESSAY OUTLINE PAGE).

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Why Do It?

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- IT IS VALUABLE TRAINING IN WRITING AND RESEARCHING.
- SINCE YOU MUST BE CLEAR AND CONCISE, YOU MUST CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY TO GET THE MOST MEANING WITH THE FEWEST WORDS.
- IT'S VALUABLE PRACTICE IN READING AS WELL. TO SUMMARIZE ANOTHER'S WRITING IN YOUR OWN WORDS, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THE CONTENT THOROUGHLY.

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PRÉCIS REQUIREMENTS

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- A PRÉCIS GIVES ONLY THE 'HEART' OF THE PASSAGE.
- IT OMITTS REPETITION AND SUCH DETAILS AS EXAMPLES, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND ADJECTIVES UNLESS THEY ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.
- A PRÉCIS MUST BE WRITTEN ENTIRELY IN YOUR OWN WORDS. AVOID THE TEMPTATION TO LIFT SENTENCES OR LONG PARTS OF SENTENCES FROM THE ORIGINAL.
- A PRÉCIS IS WRITTEN FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE AUTHOR WHOSE WORK IS BEING SUMMARIZED. AVOID SUCH EXPRESSIONS AS "THE AUTHOR SAYS" OR "THIS PARAGRAPH MEANS". ALSO, YOUR OPINION IS NOT REQUESTED.

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STEPS IN PRÉCIS WRITING

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FROM
READING
TO
WRITING

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STEP ONE

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- READ THE ORIGINAL PASSAGE CAREFULLY.
- TRY TO GRASP THE MAIN POINT.
- LOOK UP THE MEANING OF WORDS YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE.
- MAKE NOTES/UNDERLINE KEY PASSAGES.

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STEP TWO

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- WRITE THE MAIN POINTS IN YOUR OWN WORDS.
- EXCEPT FOR KEY WORDS WHICH ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO OMIT, USE YOUR OWN WORDING THROUGHOUT.
- REMEMBER, THOUGH, NOT TO ADD OPINIONS OR IDEAS THAT ARE NOT IN THE ORIGINAL.
- REVISE UNTIL YOUR PRÉCIS READS SMOOTHLY AND IS THE REQUIRED LENGTH.

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PRÉCIS EXAMPLE

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FROM
MALE MANNERS: THE YOUNG MAN'S GUIDE
(1970):

CHAPTER 6
ALL ABOUT PARTIES, PROMS, & WEEKENDS

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ORIGINAL PIECE OF WRITING

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BEING A GOOD GUEST

ONCE YOU ARRIVE AT A PARTY, YOUR OBLIGATION GOES BEYOND FILLING UP A CHAIR. YOU ARE EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE IN SOME WAY, WHETHER IT'S JUST BEING PLEASANT AND AGREEABLE, PLAYING PIANO, OR PASSING SANDWICHES. AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO YOUR DATE IS MORE THAN PROVIDING TRANSPORTATION. SEE THAT SHE HAS A GOOD TIME ALSO. YOU DON'T HAVE TO ACT LIKE SIAMESE TWINS, BUT DON'T DROP HER AND GO OFF IN A CORNER WITH THE BOYS – OR ANOTHER GIRL! AND, ABOVE ALL ELSE, REMEMBER THIS COURTESY: DON'T FLIRT WITH ANOTHER FELLOW'S GIRL.

TOTAL WORDS = 90 (NOT INCLUDING 'BEING A GOOD GUEST')
OPTIMUM PRÉCIS LENGTH = 30 WORDS (1/3 OF ORIGINAL)
IN PARTNERS, CREATE A 30-WORD PRÉCIS. (5 MINUTES)

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POSSIBLE PRÉCIS

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AS A GUEST, YOU HAVE OBLIGATIONS WHEN YOU GO TO A PARTY. YOU SHOULD HELP OUT THE HOST, BE NICE TO YOUR DATE, AND NEVER FLIRT WITH ANOTHER GUY'S GIRL. (EXACTLY 30 WORDS)

NOTE:

- STILL FROM AUTHOR'S POINT OF VIEW.
- NO OPINION ADDED.

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IN-CLASS ACTIVITY

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- TAKE THE FINAL PARAGRAPH OF THE SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT BODY ON PAGE 428 ('WHILE WE'RE WAITING...') AND CREATE A PRÉCIS OF EXACTLY 25 WORDS. THE ORIGINAL LENGTH IS 75 WORDS.
- RULES:
 - USE THE INDEX CARD PROVIDED.
 - MUST BE EXACT.
 - NO OPINIONS.
 - WRITE FROM THE SAME POINT OF VIEW AS THE AUTHOR.
 - MUST BE WRITTEN IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

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