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## UNIT 13 PRECIS WRITING

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### 13.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the meaning of the term ‘precis’;
- outline the characteristics of a good précis;
- identify the problems in writing a précis;
- describe the method of writing a précis and
- write a precis for a given passage.

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Unit 12, you learnt about the preparation of various types of reports. In this unit you will learn about another important secretarial function, precis writing, which involves an exercise in comprehension and condensation of an article, speech or correspondence. Thus, precis writing means summarising. In order to make a summary of an article, a speech or a story, one has to read it carefully and grasp its meaning. Precis-writing forces one to concentrate on the material which is to be summarised. The primary object of precis writing is to present facts and information to spend time reading unnecessary details. The necessity of speedily reading documents mainly arises in business firms and government departments besides other fields of activity. Lawyers, journalists, students, and secretaries of business executives need to apply the art of precis writing regularly in their day to day activities. Lawyers have to summarise the main points of their cases, editors and reporters have to summarise news and speeches; students have to make notes from lectures and text-books. In this unit, you will study about all these aspects.

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## 13.2 WHAT IS A PRECIS?

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'Precis' is a French word derived from the Latin word 'Praecissus', past participle of 'Praecidere' which means to cut off, to be brief, and is connected with the English word 'Precis'.

A precis is a summary or the gist of the main ideas of written matter. Thus, precis writing means summarising. It is an exercise in concentration, comprehension and condensation. In order to make a summary of an article, a speech or a story, one has to read it carefully and grasp its meaning. Precis-writing forces one to concentrate on the material which is to be summarised.

In summarising a passage, though the length of the summary is not fixed, it is generally expected that the summary would be one third the length of the passage. The summary is known as precis and precis writing means summarising. It involves preparing a statement concisely so as to convey the essential ideas contained in a longer passage or article. In other words, precis is the gist or substance of a lengthy passage. A precis is not a paraphrase. At the same time, the essential points of the main passage must be presented in the precis in such a manner that the reader may easily grasp the main ideas of the passage.

The primary object of precis writing is to present facts and information to spend time reading unnecessary details. The necessity of speedily reading documents mainly arises in business firms and government departments besides other fields of activity. Lawyers, journalists, students, and secretaries of business executives need to apply the art of precis writing regularly in their day to day activities. Lawyers have to summarise the main points of their cases, editors and reporters have to summarise news and speeches; students have to make notes from lectures and text-books. The importance of precis writing in business lies in the economical way of recording and presenting lengthy documents in compressed form. Busy executives and managers in large organizations can get in the precis all the essential points and thus can avoid the time-consuming process of going through long correspondence, reports, etc. An important duty of the secretary of every organisation is to prepare the precis of business documents including letters, reports and minutes of meetings.

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## 13.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PRECIS

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The characteristics of a good precis may be outlined as follows:

- 1) A good precis is not merely a list of the main ideas of a passage. The ideas are to be organised and expressed in a logical sequence so that the precis reads like an original piece of composition.
- 2) A good precis should contain all the essential ideas in the original passage, omitting non-essential detail, examples, etc. The ideas should be, as far as possible, in the same order as in the original. We should remember that in a precis one should not add anything that the original passage does not contain. There is no need to comment on the original matter either.
- 3) The language of precis should be clear, brief and precis, maintaining at the same time the style and spirit of the original.

- 4) A precis should be written in indirect speech.
- 5) A good precis should, as far as possible, be in the writer's own words.
- 6) It should not exceed or fall short of the length prescribed by too large a margin. Usually, the limit set for a precis is one third in length of the original.

**Check Your Progress A**

- 1) Define the term 'Precis'.

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- 2) Write the importance of writing a precis.

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- 3) List four characteristics of a good precis.

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**13.4 METHOD OF WRITING A PRECIS**

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To write a good precis of a passage one needs to practice a lot. The major steps to be followed while writing a precis are:

- 1) First of all, one should read the passage two or three times carefully to understand clearly its general theme. In short, comprehension of the passage is the first step in precis-writing.
- 2) Secondly, it is necessary to write down the main points of the passage by picking out the essential ideas and leaving out the unimportant details. At this stage, compression or condensation of the passage takes place. Repetitions, illustrations and examples can be eliminated. Sentences and clauses may also be compressed into shorter by using, for instance, a word for a phrase, a phrase for a clause and so on. In compressing a passage, selection, rejection and generalisation are often useful. The words and sentences of the original passage should be avoided to the extent possible. But one has to make sure that the sentences are linked up properly to show the interrelationship of the ideas in the passage. While being a summary of the original, the precis should be a piece of self contained readable and continuous whole.

- 3) Next, write down a preliminary or a rough draft, keeping in mind the length of the precis.
- 4) If it is necessary to provide a title to the summary, a short title may be given which will express the ideas in the passage.
- 5) While making the final draft, one should make sure that all the main points are included in the precis. One should also check whether the precis reads well and is within the length prescribed. Give it a suitable heading.

If one is able to write a good precis, it is an indication of his or her ability to think clearly and to distinguish what is important and what is not.

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### 13.5 PROBLEMS IN WRITING A PRECIS

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In writing a precis, one usually faces the following problems.

**Accuracy:** The first problem in writing a precis is to get the facts straight. One should not make any statement without the support of facts. It is important to go through the précis carefully to make sure that whatever is stated is factually correct.

**Using Own Words:** The second problem is the difficulty using one's own words in the precis to convey ideas given in the original passage. The best way to overcome the problem is to read the passage carefully at least three to four times, and then writing the precis without looking at the original. In this way, one may be able to use one's own words, without the temptation of borrowing directly from the original. However, if some words and phrases have been used from the original from source, the same may be underlined. At the time of revision, own words may be used in place of the underlined words. If it is impossible to change some words, one may retain them from the passage.

**Selecting Details:** The third problem is deciding on the details to be included in the précis. One should try to pick out only those details that are important. For example: Two people may go to a restaurant and order many dishes and engage in lengthy conversation. In a precis covering the above sentence, you do not need to mention each item of food and drink. If one of the character gets drunk, however, it may be noted that the observation made by the person were under the influence of liquor. Similarly, one need not report the entire conversation; only the relevant part and important points need to be recorded. Certain things are more important than others, and one must choose details according to the scale of importance.

**Avoiding Conclusions:** Since a precis is a factual summary of a passage, one should avoid drawing conclusions based on one's own interpretation of the facts. Personal opinion has no place in a precis, so it is better to stick to details.

**Avoiding Short Sentences:** Although one may concentrate on essentials in the precis, short and choppy sentences should be avoided. Here is an example:

Mary is beginning to walk to the Church. She is old but cheerful. She walks with a cane. She has walked this way many times.

Here there are four sentences, all very short and beginning with the subject followed immediately by the verb. Sentences like these are jerky in style. A revision of such a passage should reduce the number of sentences but keep the same details as in the following:

Mary begins her familiar walk from her home to the Church. She is an old woman who needs a cane for support, but she is cheerful.

### Check Your Progress B

1) Write three problems faced in writing a precis?

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2) State whether the following statements are **True** or **False** ?

- i) A precis is an exercise in concentration, comprehension and condensation.
- ii) Comprehension of the passage of the original are to be retained in the precis.
- iii) The words and sentences of the original are to be retained in the precis.
- iv) A precis need not contain all the essential ideas in the original.
- v) A precis should be written in direct speech.
- vi) The title of the precis should be short and express the theme of the subject.
- vii) You cannot write a good precis unless you have carefully studied and understood the material you want to summarise.

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### 13.6 SOME ILLUSTRATIONS

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In earlier sections of this unit, you have learnt the meaning of precis its characteristic, the problems involved in writing a precis and the method of writing a precis. Now you are in a position to write a precis of any given passage. Let us do some exercises.

#### Exercise 1

The passage given below describes the Industrial Revolution of Europe and the improved conditions of the working class. It consists of 292 words. Let us write a precis of about 100 words and suggest a title:

First, read the passage carefully.



- 2) In earlier civilisations, there was a big gap between the conditions of kings, etc. and those of the masses.
- 3) The effect of the Industrial Revolution on the lot of the working classes is significant.
- 4) The starting of the Trade Unions.

With the help of the points given below, we can attempt the rough draft of the precis.

### **First Draft**

An important feature of this century is the improvement in the living conditions of the working classes, in the form of more power, wealth, leisure and security. At one time, kings, leaders, priests, etc., lived in comfort doing little or no work while the majority did all the work and enjoyed few comforts and rights. In some countries there were slaves who had no rights at all. During the Industrial Revolution of Europe, production increased and workers started feeling dissatisfied. Employers were induced to improve working conditions so as to improve production. Some even felt workers had a right to better conditions. Clever employers selected the best workers. This led to competition and improvement of working conditions. Soon Trade Unions were organised to fight for 'rights' of workers or even to start strikes. Now employers and employees have come to realise their mutual dependence and strikes are disappearing. (148 words)

There are 148 words in the passage above. It is necessary for us to reduce the number to about 100 words so that it would be one-third of the original passage. We shall, therefore, reduce the passage further to make it a precis of about 100 words. Read the passage given below and note how we have condensed almost all the sentences to make it a good précis within 100 words.

### **Final Draft**

An important feature of this century is the improvement of the lot of the workers. In earlier civilisations, kings, priests, etc., lived comfortably doing little, while the majority worked hard with few comforts and rights. Some societies had slaves too. During the Industrial Revolution, production increased and workers started feeling dissatisfied. Clever employers attracted the best workers by offering better conditions and thus led to improvement in production. Some employers thought that workers had a right to better conditions. Soon Trade unions were organised to fight for workers rights with strikes, if necessary. Now, there is increasing realisation of the mutual dependence of employers and their workers. (107 words)

The title we may suggest is:

## **INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE WORKING CLASS**

### **Exercise 2**

Let us take up another passage and attempt writing a precis in about 85 words and also suggest a title. This passage is on advertising. Let us read the passage.

The chief object of the repetitive form of advertisement is to help people to remember the product. The general principle is similar to that followed by Bajaj Automotives Ltd: "You just can't beat a Bajaj". The repetition of a phrase, the inclusion of a trade name or a trade mark in every advertisement is intended to impress upon the mind of the reader/ listener that name or phase or picture. The response sought by the advertiser is achieved when a customer enters a shop for, say, toothpaste. To the shop-keeper's question, "Any particular brand, please?", the customer gives the reply that is in his mind, not necessarily because he has arrived at a decision by any process of reasoning, nor because some strong feeling has been aroused for some particular brand, but simply because he has repeatedly seen the name, and it is associated in his mind with the idea of a good toothpaste. Some trade names become so common that they displace the true name of the commodity itself, such as 'vaseline', the well-known trade name for 'petroleum jelly'. Advertisements which have relied on repetition have, in the past, proved very powerful, but with the increased variety of proprietary articles and products intended for the same purpose, this kind of advertising is losing some of its value because of the confusion of names that arise in a customer's mind when he wishes to buy, say, cigarettes, tobacco, soap, chocolates, tea and other goods which are widely used. (248 words)

Now prepare a brief outline of the main points as we have done in the earlier exercise.

### **Main Points**

- 1) Simplest form of advertising is repetition; it helps people to remember.
- 2) A phrase or trade name or trade mark is used repeatedly to make an impression.
- 3) Customer asks for product, name of which is impressed on her/his mind.
- 4) Repetition advertising is becoming less effective now.

You can now make an attempt to write the final version of the precis and compare the same with the one given below.

### **Precis**

The use of repetition is the simplest form of advertising. In advertisements, repeated use of a particular phrase or trade-mark aims to make such an impression on the customer that he will tend to buy that product. Indeed, some trade-names, 'vaseline' for example, have become so well known that they are used instead of the real name of the products. Owing to the large number of consumer articles and products now in the market, advertising by repetition is less effective than it was in the past. (87 words)

The title may be suggested as below:

## **ADVERTISING BY REPETITION**

### **Exercise 3**



Let us take up another passage and attempt writing a precis in about 100 words and also suggest a title. This passage is on effect of COVID-19 on tourism industry (adapted from a report of International Monetary Fund).

Let us read the passage.

Before COVID-19, travel and tourism had become one of the most important sectors in the world economy, accounting for 10 percent of global GDP and more than 320 million jobs worldwide.

In 1950, at the dawn of the jet age, just 25 million people took foreign trips. By 2019, that number had reached 1.5 billion, and the travel and tourism sector had grown to almost too-big-to-fail proportions for many economies.

The global pandemic, the first of its scale in a new era of interconnectedness, has put 100 million jobs at risk, many in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that employ a high share of women, who represent 54 percent of the tourism workforce, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Tourism-dependent countries will likely feel the negative impacts of the crisis for much longer than other economies. Contact-intensive services key to the tourism and travel sectors are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and will continue to struggle until people feel safe to travel en masse again.

“There is no way we can grow our way out of this hole we are in,” Irwin LaRocque, secretary-general of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), [said at a virtual event](#) in September.

From the white sand beaches of the Caribbean, Seychelles, Mauritius, and the Pacific to the back streets of Bangkok, to Africa’s sweeping national parks, countries are grappling with how to lure back visitors while avoiding new outbreaks of infection. The solutions range from wooing the ultra-rich who can quarantine on their yachts to inviting people to stay for periods of up to a year and work virtually while enjoying a tropical view.

Tourism receipts worldwide are not expected to recover to 2019 levels until 2023. In the first half of this year, tourist arrivals fell globally by more than 65 percent, with a near halt since April—compared with 8 percent during the global financial crisis and 17 percent amid the SARS epidemic of 2003, according to ongoing IMF research on tourism in a post-pandemic world.

### **Main Points**

- 1) Before Covid-9, travel accounted for 10 per cent of global GDP.
- 2) It provided more than 320 million jobs worldwide.
- 3) The global pandemic has put 100 million jobs at risk.

4) Tourism-dependent countries will feel the negative impacts of the crisis for much longer.

You can now write the final version of the precis and compare the same with the one given below.

### **Precis**

The Covid-19 pandemic has put 100 million jobs at risk, many in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that employ a high share of women, who represent 54 per cent of the tourism workforce. Tourism-dependent countries are most negatively impacted, because it involves contact-intensive services. In view of this, travel sectors are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and will continue to struggle until people feel safe to travel en masse again. From the white sand beaches of the Caribbean, Seychelles, Mauritius, and the Pacific to the back streets of Bangkok, to Africa's sweeping national parks, countries are grappling with how to lure back visitors while avoiding new outbreaks of infection. (120 words).

The title may be suggested as below:

## **EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM**

### **Exercise 4**

Let us take up another passage and attempt writing a precis in about 100 words and also suggest a title. This passage is on vaccination in Delhi (adapted from a report in Hindustan Times, 8 March, 2021).

Let us read the passage

Over three lakh beneficiaries have received Covid-19 vaccine till date in Delhi since the start of the inoculation drive a month ago, with more than 27,000 people receiving shots on Monday, according to the official data. Of these, more than 1.35 lakh are healthcare workers and over 1.71 lakh frontline workers, as per the data. On Monday, 27,219 beneficiaries received shots across 306 centres, including 5,459 people who got their second dose, as the inoculation drive picked up pace, officials said. The overall turnout was about 88 per cent. Eight minor cases of AEFI (adverse events following immunisation) were reported, they added. Till date, 1,35,034 healthcare workers have been vaccinated. A total of 1,71,079 frontline workers have also received jabs, as per the data shared by the officials. Frontline workers include police personnel, civil defence staff, sanitation workers, among others. The vaccination drive, started on January 16, has picked up pace in the last one week. Under the nationwide mega vaccination drive launched on January 16, a total of 4,319 (53 per cent) healthcare workers, against a target of 8,117, were administered the shots at 81 centres across the city on day one. As per doctors, the second dose is given to a beneficiary after a gap of 28 days. On February 13, a total of 13,768 beneficiaries received vaccine shots and second doses were administered to healthcare workers who had received the first jab 28 days ago. On the second scheduled day after the roll-out of the exercise on January 16, the figures had stood at 3,598 (44 per cent of the target). The sharp fall had come after one severe and 50 minor

adverse effect cases were reported, on the opening day of the vaccination drive. The count on third schedule day was relatively much higher at 4,936 (48 per cent).

### **Main Points**

- 1) Over three lakh beneficiaries have received Covid-19 vaccine till date in Delhi.
- 2) Of these, more than 1.35 lakh are healthcare workers.
- 3) And over 1.71 lakh frontline workers.
- 4) The vaccination drive, started on January 16, has picked up pace in the last one week.

You can now write the final version of the precis and compare the same with the one given below.

### **Precis**

The vaccination drive in Delhi started on January 16. A total of 4,319 (53 per cent) healthcare workers, against a target of 8,117, were administered the shots at 81 centres across the city on day one. Till date, 1,35,034 healthcare workers have been vaccinated. A total of 1,71,079 frontline workers have also received jabs, as per the data shared by the officials. Frontline workers include police personnel, civil defence staff, sanitation workers, among others. As per doctors, the second dose is given to a beneficiary after a gap of 28 days. On February 13, a total of 13,768 beneficiaries received vaccine shots and second doses were administered to healthcare workers who had received the first jab 28 days ago. Over three lakh beneficiaries have received Covid-19 vaccine till date in Delhi since the start of the inoculation drive a month ago, with more than 27,000 people receiving shots on Monday, according to the official data. (120 words).

The title may be suggested as below:

### **VACCINATION DRIVE IN DELHI**

### **Check Your Progress C**

Write a precis of the following passage in not more than 160 words and suggest a title for it. Before writing the final version of the precis, note down the main points of the passage.

In the last half of the nineteenth century 'capital' and 'labour' were enlarging and perfecting their rival organisations on modern lines. Many an old family firm was replaced by a limited liability company with salaried managers. The change met the technological requirements of the new age by engaging a large professional element; and prevented the decline in efficiency that marred the fortunes of family firms in the second and third generation after the energetic founder. It was, moreover, a step away from individual initiative, towards collectivism and municipal and stage-managed



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### 13.7 LET US SUM UP

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A precis is a summary of the whole passage. Precis writing is an exercise in concentration, comprehension and condensation. One has to read the passage carefully and grasp its meaning before writing a precis. The art of writing a good precis is very useful to people like lawyers, journalists, students, secretaries and business managers.

Before one starts writing the precis of a passage, one should read the whole passage at least twice, slowly carefully and with concentration. This will help him to get a general idea of what the passage is about and what the author is trying to say.

A precis should be written in indirect speech. Further one must ensure that each idea follows logically from the one before, so that the precis has a logical flow and cohesion. In addition to unity, one must also ensure that the precis is factually correct and it does not contain ideas or opinions which are not in the original passage. One should not add own ideas or comments or any extra information not contained in the passage.

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### 13.8 KEY WORDS

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**Beneficiaries:** The people who receive benefits. In the present case, people who received vaccination.

**Cohesion:** A piece of text in which ideas fit well together to form a unified whole.

**Comprehension:** An exercise in language teaching to find out how well you understand a piece of spoken and written language.

**Condensation:** To make something shorter.

**Diffuse:** A text that is vague and difficult to understand or explain.

**Frontline Workers:** The people who manage civil duties and defend borders.

**Gist:** The general meaning or the most important points of a long piece of writing.

**Indirect Speech:** Where the speaker's exact words are not given but the exact meaning of the remark or speech is given in passive voice.

**Phrase:** A group of words, containing neither subject nor predicate, which functions as a unit within a sentence.

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### 13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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B) 2 (i) True (ii) False (iii) False (iv) False (v) False (vi) True (vii) True

C) The main points of the passage are:

- 1) In the second half of the 19th century, industry in Britain was reorganised on a larger and more impersonal basis:
  - family firms became limited liability companies; and
  - municipalities went into business
  
- 2) The class of shareholders
  - became numerous and more important; and
 investment without having any responsibility.
  
- 3) Labour relations declined because of :
  - the shareholder's irresponsibility;
  - the shareholder's ignorance of the conditions of the working class; and
  - the impersonality of large companies.
 The developing status of the trade unions enabled work people to resist management.  
 The resulting disputes led to mutual respect and a desire for fair negotiation.
  
- 4) Industrial relations took on a new pattern.

The following is an acceptable version of the precis

Between 1850 and 1900 British industry became organised on a larger scale and so became impersonal. Old family firms gave place to limited liability companies, and municipalities became large-scale employers to provide services for the ratepayers. These developments led to a growth in the number and significance of shareholders, who with little effort, gained great wealth from Britain's world-wide trade and investment and had little or no responsibility for the way that the wealth was gained. The shareholders irresponsibility, their ignorance of how the poor lived, and the size of the companies which inhibited personal relations, led to ill-feeling between capital and labour. However, the growing influence and discipline of the trade unions enabled the work people to resist unfair management. Strikes and lockouts taught the two sides to respect each other and to negotiate on a fair basis. In this way industrial relations moved from the paternalism of the family business to the organizational pattern of today. (155 words)

The title we may suggest is:

### **NEW PATTERN OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

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#### **13.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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- 1) State the characteristics of a good precis?
- 2) Discuss the various steps in writing a precis.
- 3) What are the problems you face in writing a precis?
- 4) Write a precis of the following passage in about 115 words. Your version should avoid as far as possible the words and phrases of the original. State the number of words you have used and suggest a title.

If a business activity does not require anything special to be done, it is not entrepreneurship. In fact a person cannot be called an entrepreneur unless he introduces something new, something different, in his venture. This is known as innovation, that is, doing something different from others. The entrepreneurs are constantly on the look out for something unique to fulfil the need or want of people. They may or may not be investors of new products or new methods of production, but they are able to foresee the possibility of making use of the invention for business. Others who come to know about the same invention are not capable of thinking about its practical usefulness in business. Or, they may not have the ambition or self-confidence to take advantage of it.

In a competitive market, an entrepreneur can succeed in his business only through innovation. An innovation need not necessarily be something big or dramatic. A simple adjustment to something old, or giving a service without extra charge or a colourful packaging or selling a product in packets of different weights, and such types of steps may be profitable innovations. Of course, if similar things are done by a number of producers and sellers, and entrepreneur has to think of other types of innovations. No wonder that imagination is something more important than knowledge for innovative thinking. An entrepreneur must have imagination and also the ability to think creatively.

Take the case of fruit juice. Now-a-days fruit juice is sold in small cartoons instead of bottles so that you can carry it and throw away the container after drinking the juice. This is an innovation. Let us take another example. You may have heard of Henry Ford who established the Ford Motor Company in the United States. He did not invent the automobile, but he applied new methods of mass production and turned out passenger cars at low cost so that many people could afford it. (338 words)

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