

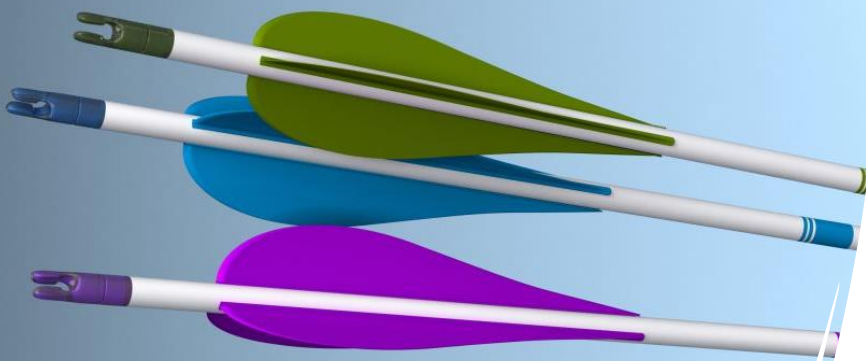


Unit 8. Further summary practice



Objectives:

- To demonstrate understanding of explicit, implicit meanings and attitudes
- To select and use information for specific purposes
- To organise and structure ideas and opinions for deliberate effect
- To make accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar



Further summary and reading practice

- In general, summary questions are usually based on factual, non-fiction passages. They require you to write a straightforward summary of the main details contained in the passage that are relevant to the specific requirements of the question that has been set.
- However, sometimes passages used for summary are based on types of writing other than that which is intended to convey information.

The following exercises are based on a range of types of writing.

Passage 1

Passage 1 is a newspaper article about the ways in which women's football is using social media to promote its image.

Passage 2

Passage 2 is taken from a speech given by an American educator, in which he is putting forward a deliberately controversial view about education in the present day.

Passage 3

Passage 3 is an extract from Charles Dickens' novel Bleak House, describing (and satirizing the behavior of) the eccentric Mrs Jellyby.

Passage 4

Passage 4 is a more conventional informative passage about the early history of advertising.

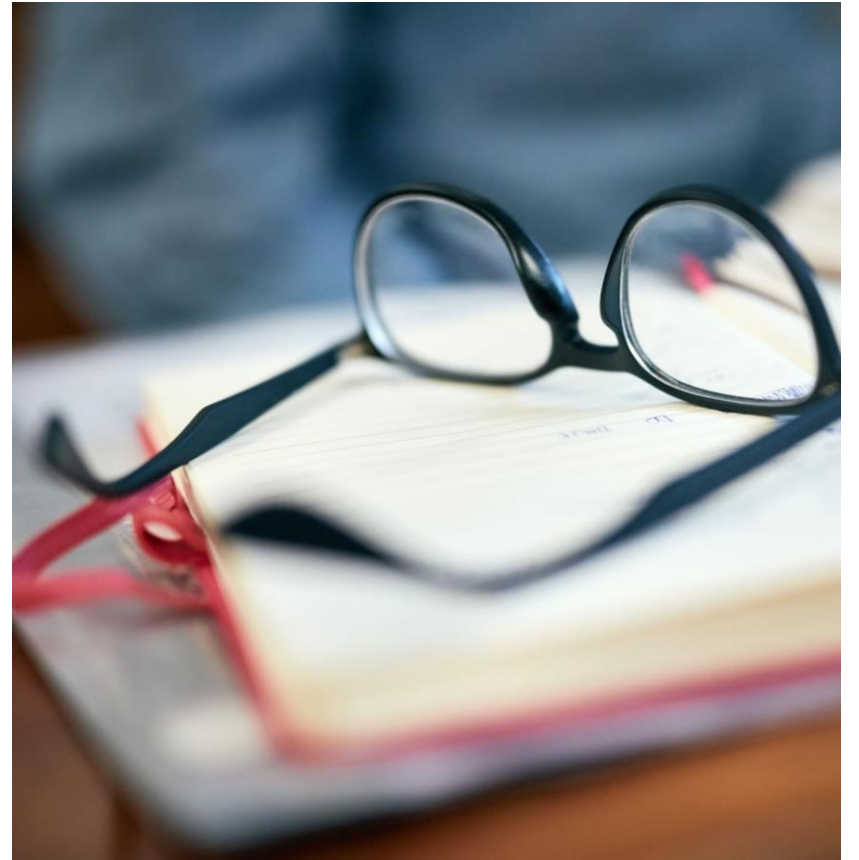
Passage 5

Passage 5 gives two different accounts (the first is a newspaper article; the second is a blog) of a visit to the Dutch theme park, Efteling, providing you with the opportunity to write a summary based on two passages.

Remember

The exercises relating to these passages allow you to approach summary writing in different ways and also provide extra practice exercises to test your skills in other types of reading questions (such as directed writing). However, in all cases, you should concentrate on making notes of the main points before writing your final version.

Remember to use your own words as far as possible and to write between 200 and 250 words.





Exemplar
question and
sample response

Dieting vs. Exercise for Weight Loss (1)

By Gretchen Reynolds

Two groundbreaking new studies address the irksome question of why so many of us who work out remain so heavy, a concern that carries special resonance at the moment, as lean Olympians slip through the air and water, inspiring countless viewers to want to become similarly sleek. (2)

And in a just world, frequent physical activity should make us slim. But repeated studies have shown that many people who begin an exercise programme lose little or no weight. Some gain.

To better understand why, anthropologists leading one of the new studies began with a research trip to Tanzania. There, they recruited volunteers from the Hadza tribe, whose members still live by hunting and gathering.

The researchers gathered data for 11 days, then calculated the participants' typical daily physical activity, energy expenditure and resting metabolic rates. They then compared those numbers with the same measures for an average male and female Westerner.



It's long been believed that a hunter-gatherer lifestyle involves considerable physical activity and therefore burns many calories, far more than are incinerated by your average American office worker each day. And it was true, the scientists determined, that the Hadza people in general moved more than many Americans do, with the men walking about seven miles a day and the women about three. (3)

But it was not true that they were burning far more calories. In fact, the scientists calculated, the Hadza's average metabolic rate, or the number of calories that they were burning over the course of a day, was about the same as the average metabolic rate for Westerners. (4)

The implication, the scientists concluded, is that 'active, "traditional" lifestyles may not protect against obesity if diets change to promote increased caloric consumption.' That is, even active people will pack on pounds if they eat like most of us in the West. (5)

The underlying and rather disheartening message of that finding (6), of course, is that physical activity by itself is not going to make and keep you thin.

The overarching conclusion of that study, which was published last week in the journal PLoS One, is not really new or surprising, says Dr Timothy Church, who holds the John S. McIlhenny Endowed Chair in Health Wisdom at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Louisiana and who has long studied exercise and weight control. (7) 'It's been known for some time

'There's an expectation that if you exercise, your metabolism won't drop as you lose weight or will even speed up,' says Diana Thomas, a professor of mathematics at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

But she says close mathematical scrutiny of past studies of exercise and weight loss shows that that happy prospect is, sad to say, unfounded. The problem for those of us hoping to use exercise to slough off fat is that most current calculations about exercise and weight loss assume that metabolism remains unchanged or is speeded up by exercise. (8)

So Dr Thomas has helpfully begun to recalibrate weight loss formulas, taking into account the drop in metabolism. Using her new formulas, she's working with a group of volunteers, providing them with improved predictions about how much weight they can expect to lose from exercise.

The predictions are proving accurate, she says, and although her forecast is for less weight loss than that under the old formula, the volunteers are pleased. 'It's better to meet lower expectations,' she says, 'than to be disappointed that you're not losing what you supposedly should.' She is perhaps her own best advertisement. In the past few years, she's shed 70 pounds and, using her formulas for how many calories she's actually burning each day thanks to a daily walk, has regained none of it. (9)

Exercise 1.

Read carefully the passage and make notes of the main points. Then write a summary of what the passage tells you about:

- the research conducted with the Hadza tribe in Tanzania
- the findings of the studies carried out by Dr Church and Dr Thomas.

You should write between 200–250 words.

Model response

The purpose of this section is to help guide you through the process of writing a summary of this passage. Firstly, we will look at the thought processes of a student approaching the task and relate these to the highlighted sections. Next we will make numbered notes of the main points to be included. Finally, we will produce an example of a final summarised version of the points required by the question.

Thought process



Sections of the passage highlighted in **yellow** are commented on below.

- 1 The title of the passage is a useful way of finding an overview; however, does it match the requirements of the question? In this case it does, so it's useful to keep the point in mind to help give a clear focus when writing the final version.
- 2 This is an interesting point as it relates the passage to the world of the reader but is not relevant to the topic of the summary, so it can be ignored.
- 3 This paragraph expands on the point made in the previous paragraph – it tends to make the same point again, but should the comparison with the lifestyle of American workers be included? It would help to link the two parts of the summary, so it should be included.
- 4 But this needs to be added to the point above.
- 5 This is an expansion of the key point made in the previous sentence but it does help to clarify it, so it would be useful to include it.
- 6 This is a subjective comment and not relevant to the summary topic.
- 7 The summary is about the *findings* of Dr Church's research – although his qualifications and position are impressive, it's not necessary to include them in a summary. 'Dr Church, an expert in exercise and weight control', would be more than enough.
- 8 There's certainly a relevant point being made in these two paragraphs but in rather a long-winded way, so it needs to be made more specific in a summary.
- 9 There's definitely a concluding point made here but, in the final summary, it's best to generalise it and remove the personal reference to Dr Thomas.

Sections of the passage highlighted in **pink** contain key points for the summary.

Notes



- 1 Research is being carried out into why regular exercise does not result in participants losing weight.
- 2 Researchers studied the Hadza tribe from Tanzania who are hunter-gatherers.
- 3 They studied their daily physical activity, how much energy they used and how this affected their metabolism (the chemical processes that take place in our bodies).
- 4 It was found that although the Hadza people were much more physically active than the average American, they did not necessarily burn more calories per day than people in America with different lifestyles.
- 5 This contradicts the expected findings; the conclusion to be drawn is that physical activity alone will not keep people thin, especially if people follow typical Western eating habits.
- 6 Dr Church states that this is not surprising; previous research has shown that it's easier to lose weight through a calorie-controlled diet than through exercise – and this appeals to people more.
- 7 The belief underlying many studies of weight loss is that exercise speeds up metabolism but Dr Thomas's findings do not support this. In fact, they indicate that metabolism may drop during exercise.
- 8 Consequently, she is revising the formulas associated with weight loss through exercise.
- 9 She is encouraging the volunteers with whom she is working to have lower expectations of the weight they can expect to lose.
- 10 Her predictions about weight loss are proving to be accurate, and the volunteers are satisfied with this and not disappointed that they are not losing more.
- 11 The evidence is that by following Dr Thomas's formulas relating to exercise and weight loss, people will lose weight and not put it back on again.

It appears that regular exercise does not result in people losing weight. Researchers studied the hunter-gatherer Hadza tribe from Tanzania, in particular their daily physical activity, how much energy they used and how this affected the chemical processes that take place in their bodies (their metabolism). It was found that although they were much more physically active than the average American, they did not necessarily burn more calories per day than people in America with different lifestyles. The conclusion to be drawn is that physical activity alone will not keep people thin, especially if people follow typical Western eating habits.

According to Dr Church this is not surprising; previous research has shown that it's easier to lose weight through a calorie-controlled diet than through exercise – and this appeals to people more. Dr Thomas's findings do not support the belief that exercise speeds up metabolism and, in fact, indicate that metabolism may drop during exercise. Consequently, she is revising the formulas associated with weight loss through exercise. She is encouraging volunteers with whom she is working to have lower expectations of the weight they can expect to lose. Her predictions about weight loss are proving to be accurate, and the volunteers are satisfied with this and not disappointed that they are not losing more. The evidence is that by following Dr Thomas's formulas relating to exercise and weight loss, people will lose weight and not put it back on again. (239 words)

Final summary

Passage 1.



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Read carefully the following article and then summarise what it tells you about:

- the state of women's football in the UK in 2012
- why women's football does not have the same public profile as the men's game
- how and why the Women's Super League (WSL) is using social media.

Women footballers bring new life to the beautiful game and score with Twitter

Tracy McVeigh

After years of feeling underrated and overlooked by mainstream football pundits and press, women's football is coming into its own this season thanks to social media.

New research shows that the women's version of the game is now the third biggest team sport in the UK in terms of participation, behind only men's football and cricket.

Its previous lack of recognition is being overcome by fans turning to social networking to follow the sport. The second ever season of the Football Association's Women's Super League (WSL) kicks off on Sunday, and eight of England's top female footballers, one from each of the top clubs, will take the unprecedented step of wearing their success on their sleeve by displaying their Twitter account names on their kit.

The new semi-professional league, the top tier of women's football, was launched by the FA last year as a platform to drive forward the women's game and the association claims that it will be spending £3m on promotion in the first three years of the league.

Since the WSL launched, attendances have increased by more than 600%, viewing figures of live broadcast matches, at 450,000, are on a par with those of the men's Scottish Premier League, and the social media channels now attract more than 80,000 followers. It has transformed the player-fan relationship by making it a fully interactive league. Research commissioned for the FA by Sport England Active People ahead of the 2012 season shows that the low profile of women's football is what is driving fans to Twitter and Facebook for news. Fans are up to seven times as interactive as those of the men's game.

The Fifa women's world cup was the most tweeted-about event in the world in July 2011 with 7,196 tweets per second at its peak. It remains seventh in the list of the most tweets per second, above the Uefa Champions League in 11th position.

But the findings show that while there are 12 times as many news articles with mentions of women's football per month, relative to the number of people who attend matches, men's football receives three times as many headlines, relative to the number of fans who attend.

'It is understandable in a way,' said England international and Arsenal Ladies midfielder Steph Houghton. 'It's difficult because the men's game is so big and attracts so much money and sponsorship and so it's always going to take priority.'

'But with digital media we can really forge ahead. We don't need to struggle to get a few lines in a newspaper, we can do it for ourselves; fans can interact with players and find out about fixtures and get really involved on match days – even if they are not at the game themselves.'

Houghton, 23, has been selected as the FA WSL digital ambassador for Arsenal Ladies this season. Each club in the league will pick one player who will wear their Twitter address.

'Twitter and Facebook have helped us massively, it's just transformed things over the past year,' Houghton said. 'It's really progressing the game. Our attendance figures have increased a lot. We're doing a lot of work in schools getting girls to play football, breaking down any taboos there might be, and we're seeing them get interested, and bring their families along where they have such a good match day experience that they're coming back.'

'I think that what's happening is that girls are enjoying playing. It's a lot more acceptable and now we have a Women's Super League with hugely dedicated female role models – really committed players who people can see are dedicated and training as hard if not harder than any male players – that's all progressing the sport. And with social media there's no holding women's football back.'

From the Observer, 7 April 2012

Passage 2



Read carefully the following passage. Imagine that you are a journalist who was present when this speech was given. Write a report for the readers of your newspaper in which you make clear the attitude of the speaker and his beliefs about schools and education.

Note: This is still a summary question, but it is expressed in a slightly different way from those that you've seen so far.

Why Schools Don't Educate

By John Taylor Gatto

I've noticed a fascinating phenomenon in my twenty-five years of teaching – that schools and schooling are increasingly irrelevant to the great enterprises of the planet. No one believes anymore that scientists are trained in science classes or politicians in civics classes or poets in English classes. The truth is that schools don't really teach anything except how to obey orders. This is a great mystery to me because thousands of humane, caring people work in schools as teachers and aides and administrators but the abstract logic of the institution overwhelms their individual contributions. Although teachers do care and do work very hard, the institution is psychopathic – it has no conscience. It rings a bell and the young man in the middle of writing a poem must close his notebook and move to a different cell where he must memorize that man and monkeys derive from a common ancestor.

It is absurd and anti-life to be part of a system that compels you to sit in confinement with people of exactly the same age and social class. That system effectively cuts you off from the immense diversity of life and the synergy of variety, indeed it cuts you off from your own past and future, scaling you to a continuous present much the same way television does.

It is absurd and anti-life to be part of a system that compels you to listen to a stranger reading poetry when you want to learn to construct buildings, or to sit with a stranger discussing the construction of buildings when you want to read poetry.

It is absurd and anti-life to move from cell to cell at the sound of a gong for every day of your natural youth in an institution that allows you no privacy and even follows you into the sanctuary of your home demanding that you do its 'homework'.

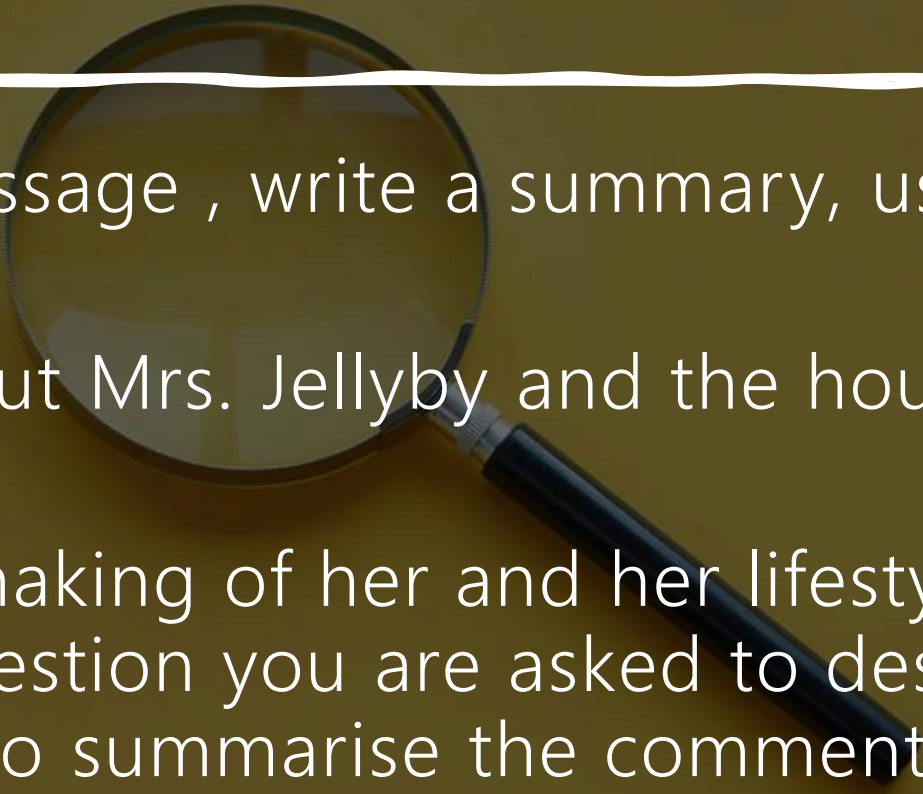
How will they learn to read? My answer is [that] when children are given whole lives instead of age-graded ones in cellblocks, they learn to read, write, and do arithmetic with ease, if those things make sense in the kind of life that unfolds around them.

But keep in mind that in the United States almost nobody who reads, writes or does arithmetic gets much respect. We are a land of talkers, we pay talkers the most and admire talkers the most, and so our children talk constantly, following the public models of television and schoolteachers. It is very difficult to teach the 'basics' anymore because they really aren't basic to the society we've made.

Two institutions at present control our children's lives – television and schooling, in that order. Both of these reduce the real world of wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice to a never-ending, non-stopping abstraction. In centuries past, the time of a child and adolescent would be occupied in real work, real charity, real adventures, and the realistic search for mentors who might teach what you really wanted to learn. A great deal of time was spent in community pursuits, practising affection, meeting and studying every level of the community, learning how to make a home, and dozens of other tasks necessary to become a whole man or woman.

Passage 3

By referring closely to the passage , write a summary, using your own words, of:

- What you have learned about Mrs. Jellyby and the house in which she lives.
 - The criticism the author is making of her and her lifestyle. (Note: In this part of the question you are asked to describe the author's criticisms, not to summarise the comments made about the character in the novel who is describing the visit.)
- 

MRS JELLYBY

I therefore supposed that Mrs Jellyby was not at home; and was quite surprised when the person appeared in the passage without the pattens [wooden shoes], and going up to the back room on the first floor, before Ada and me, announced us as, 'Them two young ladies, Missis Jellyby!' We passed several more children on the way up, whom it was difficult to avoid treading on in the dark; and as we came into Mrs Jellyby's presence, one of the poor little things fell down-stairs – down a whole flight (as it sounded to me), with a great noise.

Mrs Jellyby, whose face reflected none of the uneasiness which we could not help showing in our own faces, as the dear child's head recorded its passage with a bump on every stair – Richard afterwards said he counted seven, besides one for the landing – received us with perfect equanimity. She was a pretty, very diminutive, plump woman of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if – I am quoting Richard again – they could see nothing nearer than Africa!

'I am very glad indeed,' said Mrs Jellyby in an agreeable voice, 'to have the pleasure of receiving you. I have a great respect for Mr Jarndyce, and no one in whom he is interested can be an object of indifference to me.'

We expressed our acknowledgments, and sat down behind the door where there was a lame invalid of a sofa. Mrs Jellyby had very good hair, but was too much occupied with her African duties to brush it. The shawl in which she had been loosely muffled, dropped on to her chair when she advanced to us; and as she turned to resume her seat, we could not help noticing that her dress didn't nearly meet up the back, and that the open space was railed across with a lattice-work of stay-lace – like a summer-house.

The room, which was strewn with papers and nearly filled by a great writing-table covered with similar litter, was, I must say, not only very untidy but very dirty. We were obliged to take notice of that with our sense of sight, even while, with our sense of hearing, we followed the poor child who had tumbled downstairs: I think into the back kitchen, where somebody seemed to stifle him.

But what principally struck us was a jaded and unhealthy-looking, though by no means plain girl, at the writing-table, who sat biting the feather of her pen, and staring at us. I suppose nobody ever was in such a state of ink. And, from her tumbled hair to her pretty feet, which were disfigured with frayed and broken satin slippers trodden down at heel, she really seemed to have no article of dress upon her, from a pin upwards, that was in its proper condition or its right place.

'You find me, my dears,' said Mrs Jellyby, snuffing the two great office candles in tin candlesticks which made the room taste strongly of hot tallow (the fire had gone out, and there was nothing in the grate but ashes, a bundle of wood, and a poker), 'you find me, my dears, as usual, very busy; but that you will excuse. The African project at present employs my whole time. It involves me in correspondence with public bodies, and with private individuals anxious for the welfare of their species all over the country. I am happy to say it is advancing. We hope by this time next year to have from a hundred and fifty to two hundred healthy families cultivating coffee and educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger.'

From *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens

Passage 4



A) The society in which we live is very much dominated by advertisements of all kinds. This passage is about the ways in which advertising first came to prominence many years ago. Read the passage carefully and then **make notes** of what it tells you about the origins of advertising.

B) Use the notes that you made to write an article for a textbook intended for younger school students /10- 11 years old/. You should write about 250 words.

Early Advertising

Although word of mouth, the most basic (and still the most powerful) form of advertising, has been around ever since humans started providing each other with goods and services, Advertising as a discrete form is generally agreed to have begun alongside newspapers, in the seventeenth century. Frenchman Théophraste Renaudot (Louis XIII's official physician) created a very early version of the supermarket noticeboard, a 'bureau des addresses et des rencontres'. Parisians seeking or offering jobs, or wanting to buy or sell goods, put notices at the office on Île de la Cité. So that the maximum number of people had access to this information, Renaudot created La Gazette in 1631, the first French newspaper. The personal ad was born.

In England, line advertisements in newspapers were very popular in the second half of the seventeenth century, often announcing the publication of a new book, or the opening of a new play. The Great Fire of London in 1666 was a boost to this type of advertisement, as people used newspapers in the aftermath of the fire to advertise lost and found, and changes of address. These early line ads were predominantly informative, containing descriptive, rather than persuasive language.

Advertisements were of key importance, even at this early point in their history, when it came to informing consumers about new products. Coffee is one such example. Coffee was first brewed into a drink in the Middle East, in the fifteenth century. The Arabs kept the existence of this vivifying concoction a secret, refusing to export beans (or instructions on how to grind and brew them). Legend has it that Sufi Baba Budan smuggled seven beans into India in 1570 and planted them. Coffee then spread to Italy, and throughout Europe, served at coffeehouses. The rapid spread of coffee as both a drink and a pattern of behaviour (coffeehouses became social gathering places) is in no small part due to the advertising of coffee's benefits in newspapers.

When goods were hand-made, by local craftsmen, in small quantities, there was no need for advertising. Buyer and seller were personally known to one another, and the buyer was likely to have direct experience of the product. The buyer also had much more contact with the production process, especially for items like clothing (hand-stitched to fit) and food (assembled from simple, raw ingredients). Packaging and branding were unknown and unnecessary before the Industrial Revolution. However, once technological advances enabled the mass production



of soap, china, clothing, etc., the close personal links between buyer and seller were broken. Rather than selling out of their back yards to local customers, manufacturers sought markets a long way from their factories, sometimes on the other side of the world.

This created a need for advertising. Manufacturers needed to explain and recommend their products to customers whom they would never meet personally. Manufacturers, in chasing far-off markets, were beginning to compete with each other. Therefore they needed to **brand** their products, in order to distinguish them from one another, and create mass recommendations to support the mass production and consumption model.

Newspapers provided the ideal vehicle for this new phenomenon, advertisements. New technologies were also making newspapers cheaper, more widely available, and more frequently printed. They had more pages, so they could carry more, bigger, advertisements. Simple descriptions, plus prices, of products served their purpose until the mid-nineteenth century, when technological advances meant that illustrations could be added to advertising, and colour was also an option. Advertisers started to add **copy** under the simple headings, describing their products using persuasive prose.

An early advertising success story is that of Pears Soap. Thomas Barratt married into the famous soap-making family and realised that they needed to be more aggressive about pushing their products if they were to survive. He bought the copyright to a painting by noted Pre-Raphaelite artist, Sir John Everett Millais, originally entitled 'Bubbles'. Barratt added a bar of Pears Soap to the bottom left of the image, and emblazoned the company name across the top, launching the series of ads featuring cherubic children which firmly welded the brand to the values it still holds today. He took images considered as 'fine art' and used them to connote his brand's quality, purity (i.e. untainted by commercialism) and simplicity (cherubic children). The campaign was a huge success.

Passage 5

- Read carefully the two passages that follow. Write a summary, using information from both passages, of what you learn about Efteling Theme Park and what visitors can do there.



Visit to Efteling Theme Park

One of our fun-filled outings as a family with young kids has been to Efteling Theme Park, in the Netherlands. Efteling is one of the oldest theme parks in the world (rumour has it that the Disney Parks have been inspired by Efteling). It is a fantasy-based theme park and all rides and attractions are based on popular fairy tales, folklores, myths and legends. As you enter the parking lot the building with its pointed cones beckons you with promises and treats galore. Once you get inside, both children and adults are transported to a totally charming land of fairy tale characters and interesting rides.

The park is based over an area of 160 acres (about 0.6 km²) and spread over a natural forest area with pine trees and many ponds and gardens which have been all used scenically to create an old world charm making it very different from a modern theme park. What I also want to say is there is a fair bit of walking to do. One can take prams for little ones or can even rent some push-cars for the older ones. You can also take a steam train from a quaint station which takes you around the park and its attractions.

Efteling started in 1952 as a theme park for children and then kept adding incrementally to become a park targeted at both adults and children. The entire park can be divided into 4 realms broadly speaking – Fairy, Travel, Adventure and Other Realm (names make more sense in Dutch, but presenting the English translations here) – based on the type of attractions.

If you go with young ones, you are most likely to do the Fairy Realm in detail, which is what we did in the half day we had there. Wander into the Fairy Tale Forest and encounter fairy-tale characters – Rapunzel lowering her hair, the dancing red shoes, the houses of Rumpelstiltskin, Snow White and the seven dwarfs, The Frog King, Sleeping Beauty, Long-Neck, etc. Most of these are houses which show the characters with all the props and the attention to detail is really commendable. The most compelling of the lot was the Fairy Tale Tree (Sprookjesboom). The tree tells all those gathered around it fairy tales and you can almost believe it's true as you see it moving its jaws. There are also these waste paper bins called Holle Bolle Gijs, based on the story of a very hungry boy, who keeps saying paper here, paper here, basically meaning don't litter.

A must-see is Efteling Museum which also tells us about the history of the Park, a pity most of it is in Dutch. My personal favorite was the Diorama – a 3D miniature model of railways, houses, lives of the fairy-tale people. I also loved Villa Volta – a madhouse where you experience bizarre things. Raveleijn is a live animation show, based on a fantasy book for young children. There is a Steam Carousel which is popular, too.

I would say that it's impossible to do the entire park in one day, or half a day. There is an option to stay in the park in a hotel or outside in other hotels in Kaastheuver, which gives you an option of starting early and exploring more. There are many options for food – also for vegetarians. If you are ever in the Netherlands or Belgium, do plan to visit this park.

Cheesy ... but charming

Sheryl Garratt

Sheryl Garratt and five-year-old son Liam visit an eccentric Dutch theme park. No Mickey Mouse here – it's more fairies and trolls, snowball-throwing games and talking litter bins ...

Soon after arriving at the Dutch theme park, Efteling, we were in a boat on a man-made waterway which is pretty much as you'd expect of a trip to Holland. Apart from the camels and the crocodiles ...

Floating through the bazaar of the fictional Arabian town of Fata Morgana, we passed hordes of shoppers and beggars crowding the bazaar while a man screamed in agony as a dentist administered to him in an open-air surgery. We even got to drift between the legs of a giant.

An hour or so later, we were floating again, this time in the air in open-fronted cable cars. The fairytale scenes before us on the Dream Flight were cheesy but charming, and beautifully done: the smells and temperature changed as we moved from one set to another; fairies perched in trees in a rainy wood full of goblins and trolls.

These state-of-the-art rides are recent additions to a fairy tale-themed park that is almost 50 years old, set in the Brabant region near the Belgian border. Efteling's mature woods make it less artificial than most theme parks, with clever details like talking litter bins to keep little minds occupied and little legs walking. Wholesome and quietly appealing, it's a great place to blow away the winter cobwebs.

My five-year-old son's favourite spot was the Fairytale Forest, featuring low-tech tableaux from various fairy stories. A fakir who was charming tulips from the ground before flying from one side of his home to another on a creaky magic carpet had Liam transfixed.

We stayed in the Efteling Hotel, well suited for children. It has a generous play area with actors dressed as fairies and trolls. The family rooms were large and comfortable and the hotel has its own entrance to the park, allowing guests to get to some of the more popular rides before queues build up.

The next morning, my husband played with our son in a nearby maze, whilst I rode on the stomach-churning Bird Rok, an indoor rollercoaster which lurches around for much of the time in total darkness, leaving you disorientated. 'Mum, you look funny,' observed Liam cheerfully as I got off; ignoring my pale smile he dragged me on to the nearby Carnival Festival ride. He loved it and wanted to go on again immediately.

This is only the second year the park has opened during the winter months, as 'Winter' Efteling. Although the majority of the rollercoasters and white-knuckle rides are closed, and can be seen only from the carriages of a steam train which chugs around the park, there is plenty added on to compensate. There's a huge indoor skating rink, where small children glide along holding on to chairs and parents can have hot drinks in the 'après-ski' bar. An indoor winter wonderland playground provides huge inflatables, snowball-throwing stalls and a snow slide that children can hurtle down on tyres.

On the crisp, clear winter days we were there, we were warmed up by frequent visits to reasonably priced stalls selling hot chocolate and delicious hot snacks (from doughnuts to French fries with mayonnaise). However, there is plenty to do undercover, so even rain wouldn't have dampened our spirits. We spent more than an hour, for instance, in a building housing a glorious 150-year-old steam carousel, an ornate miniature railway, a theatre where fountains danced to music and several refreshment bars.

Adapted from the *Observer*, 25 November 2001

