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# UNIT 2 NOTE-TAKING - I: SOME BASIC DEVICES

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## Structure

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- learn the techniques of reading with a purpose;
- organise the headings and subordinate points of the reading passage; and
- learn shortening devices which help in note taking.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Almost anyone who studies at a college or university or works in an office has to take notes sometimes. As a student you generally take notes while listening to a lecture in the classroom or to a speaker at a seminar, or when reading your course book. In an office you may need to take notes when the boss gives you instructions, or when you attend a meeting or a conference. Sometimes you may have to take an examination to improve your qualifications or to compete for a better job. Then you have to take notes from the books you read. While taking notes, have you ever asked yourself the reason for taking them? There are usually two main reasons:

- i) to keep a record of the speaker's or the writer's main ideas (not to take down or copy every word);
- ii) to help your memory when, for example, you are revising for an examination, or preparing a report.

The tendency of many students is to try to write down as much as possible of what the teacher is saying. In this process, they often miss the main points of the lecture, but, on the other hand, take down a lot of unimportant information. Similarly, when you are taking notes from a book or an article, it is generally not a good idea to copy out large chunks of a text, unless you are going to quote from it.

In this unit we shall deal with taking notes from reading text from the point of view of the organisation of notes. In the next unit on Note-taking (Unit 3) we shall discuss the organisation of notes in terms of Tables and Diagrams and Graphic Organisers.

## 2.2 HOW TO READ?

When we read, we generally have a purpose in mind. The purpose may be to spend some time on a rainy afternoon by reading a detective novel or a love story.

Often our purpose is to obtain information on a particular topic. When you read a passage in order to obtain specific information, it is a good idea to acquaint yourself with the text by quickly going through it i.e. you skim through the passage to understand the main idea or the gist of the passages. You will notice that some paragraphs will contain the information you want, and they must be read carefully i.e. scanned for relevant information. Other paragraphs may contain a lot of repetition, and they can be skimmed, i.e. read faster and more superficially. There may be some passages that are of no interest to us or are completely irrelevant for our purpose, and they can be skipped.

### Example 1

In the passage that follows, your purpose in reading will be to obtain information about the various kinds of heart diseases, their causes and symptoms.

- A) Heart disease is the enemy number one of the human body in our time. It accounts for the largest number deaths in all affluent societies, outstripping cancer, accidents and infections as causes of death. In developing countries as well, this trend is apparent, now that fewer people die of infections, and more children survive the diseases of childhood.
- B) There are four important types of heart diseases. Firstly, congenital heart disease, which is present at birth; an example of this is the so-called 'blue baby'. It accounts for 2 per cent of all heart diseases. The second type, rheumatic, is quite common in some 30 to 40 per cent of all heart cases. It is caused by an infection of the throat which, if untreated causes damage to the heart. The symptoms are a chronic sore throat, painful joints and high fever. This disease is widespread in many developing countries, due to poor living conditions and overcrowding.
- C) High blood pressure is also an important cause of heart disease, of the third type, hypertensive, and accounts for some 15 to 25 per cent of all heart cases. It is believed that among other factors such as stress and smoking, a higher salt intake in the diet leads to blood pressure.
- D) Degenerative heart disease, commonly known as Ischaemic heart disease, is the cause of heart attacks, and is one of the most important health problems among adults throughout the world. Ischaemic heart disease is due to blocking of the two blood vessels which supply blood to the heart muscle. At birth they are wide open, but in a diseased state one or more of these vessels is completely blocked, leading to defective blood supply to various points of the heart. This results in the well-known symptom of pain on emotional or physical stress called angina. What causes this is the laying down of a fatty substance, called cholesterol, in the wall of the artery, which gradually blocks the vessel and may close it completely.
- E) How does cholesterol get into the blood? It results partly from a diet rich in fats of animal origin, such as butter, cream, cheese, rich cuts of beef, ham and bacon, egg yolk, and saturated cooking fats, such as ghee.

*Based on the Heart in Sarah Freeman, Study Strategies in English.*

After you have read the passage once, answer the following questions.

- a) Of the four types of heart diseases mentioned here, which types were you aware of? Write them here.  
 .....  
 .....
- b) Which types of heart disease are absolutely new information for you? Write them here.

.....

.....

.....

.....

If after reading a passage you do this kind of a stock taking or questioning of yourself—it would be easier for you to decide which paragraphs to skim through and which to scan and go over thoroughly for the purposes of making notes.

Now read the passage again and find out if you can answer the following questions.

**Check Your Progress 1**

Read the above passage carefully and answer the following questions.

- 1) In Paragraph A, the writer mainly wishes to inform the reader that
  - a) More children survive the diseases of childhood than ever before.
  - b) Heart disease is also quite prevalent in developing countries.
  - c) Heart disease is the world’s major killer of our times.
- 2) Which are the topic sentences in the paragraph.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
  - c) .....
  - d) .....
  - e) .....

*(A topic sentence is one which gives the main idea of the paragraph. You have read about topic sentences in Block 2.)*

- 3) State whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F).
  - a) A congenital heart disease is something that a baby is born with. ( )
  - b) A continually bad throat and fever will always led to rheumatic heart disease. ( )
  - c) Rheumatic heart disease is common among young people in some countries. ( )
  - d) People who smoke, but take less salt in their diet, are not likely to get high blood pressure. ( )
  - e) Angina is a signal that a person has high blood pressure. ( )

- 4) a) In what types of heart diseases does diet play an important role?
  - .....
  - .....
  - .....
- b) What are the food habits that contribute to heart disease in each case?
  - .....
  - .....
  - .....

5) State the main idea of the passage. Write it as a title for the passage.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

6) a) The purpose in reading the passage was to find out details of the four types of heart diseases in terms of their causes and symptoms. Which paragraphs do you think are unimportant for this purpose?

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

b) Were they unimportant because:

- i) they did not contain the information you wanted, or
- ii) the same information was repeated again and again?

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### 2.3 SPECIMEN NOTES (USING HEADINGS AND SUBORDINATE POINTS)

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When the information content is small and not particularly well-organised, our notes may contain just a few phrases. However, when we study, our information content is often large and organised around a topic. In such a situation, it makes our notes clearer, if we have headings and subordinate points. For example, look again at the passage on heart diseases.

Your notes on this topic can look like this.

Heading: Types of Heart Diseases — Their Causes and Symptoms

Subordinate Points

- 1) Congenital h.d.
- 2) Rheumatic h.d.
- 3) Hypertensive h.d.
- 4) Ischaemic h.d.

It is perhaps helpful to follow a pattern where

- a) the heading is underlined;
- b) the subordinate points are placed under the heading and indented, that is, the lines are started further into the page than the line for the heading. This shows that they are dependent on the main topic. The subordinate points are directly under each other. This shows they are of approximately the same importance. Now write down the main points and sub-points in your note book. Compare your account of the 4 types of heart disease with the notes given below:

**Notes 1**

Types of Heart Diseases: Their Causes and Symptoms

- 1) Congenital heart disease (h.d.) present at birth e.g., blue baby

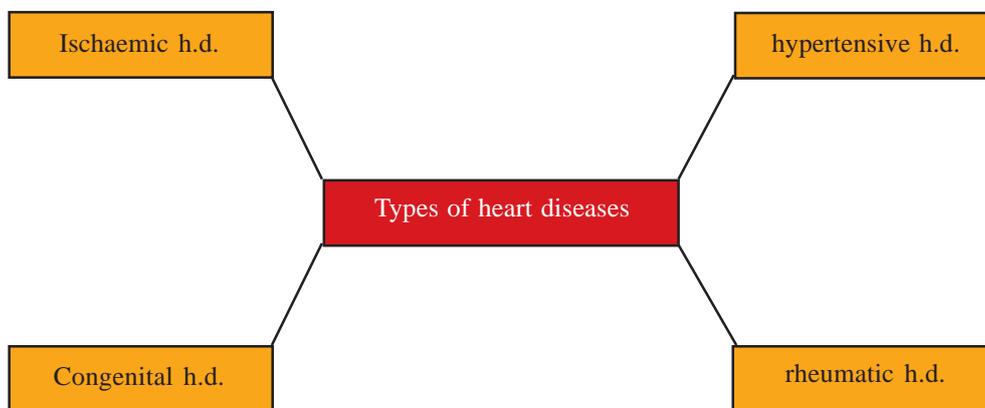
- 2) Rheumatic h.d. ← (caused by) untreated infection of throat; symptoms — chronic sore throat, painful joints, high fever; widespread in developg countries, overcrowdg + poor living conditions, accounts for 30-40% of all heart cases.
- 3) Hypertensive h.d. ← high blood pressure, stress, smoking + higher salt intake in diet.
- 4) Degenerative or Ischaemic h.d. ← blockage of arteries by cholesterol, angina, heart attacks.

### Two Types of Subordinate Points

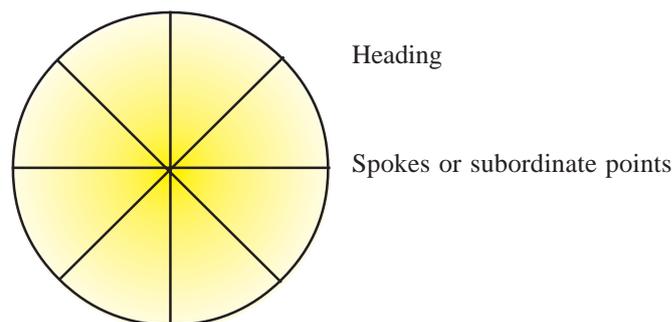
There are generally two types of subordinate points.

- Those that are independent of each other, depending only on the heading; for example, see notes (1).
- Those that are related to each other, only the first depending directly on the heading.

If you look at Notes (1) again in Section 2.2 you will notice that the subordinate points can be recorded (e.g. 4 before 3 before 2, etc.). In fact, they can also be arranged like this:



These sub-points are all directly dependent on the heading. Some books call such sub-points spokes, because they can be arranged like the spokes on the wheel of a bicycle, as shown in the figure.



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## 2.4 REDUCTION DEVICES

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You will notice in the specimen notes that the sentences and some of the words have been reduced, and certain symbols and abbreviations used. We give below a list of these reduction devices, which you can use while taking notes yourself.

Reduction devices are an important technique in note-taking. They help you save time when you are noting down something from a book. They are particularly useful when you are taking down notes from a lecture, because otherwise it will be difficult to keep pace with the speaker. Since notes do not contain repetitive and unnecessary information, reduction devices help to give a more organized picture of what the writer/speaker is saying.

You can use symbols (lines, arrows, etc.) instead of words.

a) Arrows

Look at this extract from the text:

Blockage of arteries leads to a defective blood supply to the heart. This results in the well known symptom of pain on emotional or physical stress called 'angina'.

In the notes we can write:

Blockage of arteries → def. Blood supply → angina

An arrow can also mean 'changes into', 'causes', 'contributes to', etc.

An arrow in the reverse direction (←) means 'is attributed to,' 'is caused by' as in the following example:

Rheumatic heart disease is caused by an infection of the throat which is not treated,

Rheumatic h.d. ← untreated throat infection

An arrow with two heads (↔) can mean 'related to'.

b) Underlining is used to show what is important.

c) Mathematical symbols:

i) Figures instead of words for number (26 instead of twenty-six, for example).

ii) 'the same as' becomes =

iii) 'not the same as' becomes ≠

iv) 'is less than' becomes <

v) 'is more than' becomes >

vi) 'therefore' becomes

vii) 'because' becomes

3) You can use abbreviations (a few letters instead of the whole word).

a) Units of measurement:

i) second—sec.

ii) minute—min.

iii) hour—hr.

iv) year—yr.

v) Meter—m.

vi) Kilogram—kg.

b) Useful abbreviations for words and phrases:

i) and so on—etc.

ii) compare—cf.

iii) that is—i.e.

iv) for example—e.g.

v) about, approximately—ca.

vi) Twentieth century—C<sub>20</sub>

CMYK

- c) shortening — tion or — sion at the end of a word, e.g.
  - i) reaction — react<sup>n</sup>
  - conclusion — conclus<sup>n</sup>

You can usually shorten words by omitting or shortening the ending or suffix, and putting a full-stop to show that something has been omitted. There are some words which are shortened in a standard way and others which you will have to shorten yourself on the pattern of the common words. Here are some examples of abbreviations of words taken from Example 1, which follow the pattern shown above.

Developing — develop<sup>s</sup>

Emotional — emot<sup>nl</sup>

Defective — defect<sup>ve</sup>

Important — import<sup>nt</sup>

Shortening of words as given above is probably more useful when you take down notes during a lecture, as it is difficult to keep pace otherwise. Here it doesn't really matter what system you use, as long as you can understand your own notes when you return to them after sometime. It may be a good idea when adopting your own abbreviations to write a word or a phrase in full with your abbreviation after it the first time it occurs, e.g., heart disease (h.d.)

The lists of symbols and abbreviations given here and the suggestions for shortening words and phrases are not, of course, complete and exhaustive. These are mere suggestions, which will enable you to use these abbreviations and symbols wherever you have to take down notes.

**Check Your Progress 2**

Shorten the following sentences, but do not shorten them so much that you may not understand your notes later.

- 1) At about the age of four, the school life of a child begins.  
.....
- 2) For example, water covers seventy-one percent of the earth's surface.  
.....
- 3) Heart disease causes half a million deaths a year in the United States of America.  
.....
- 4) Two important diseases caused by the deficiency of Vitamin A are Xerophthalmia and night blindness.  
.....
- 5) Road conditions also contribute to higher fuel consumption and this increases pollution  
.....

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**2.5 PASSAGES FOR NOTE-TAKING**

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Now read the following passage. Your purpose will be to discover the different theories of aging. Once again, only some paragraphs in the passage will be useful to you.

**Example 2**

- A) The average life span differs very widely for different organisms. While some live for short periods, others may have a life of several decades or even centuries. None, however, lives forever. Even if an individual meets with no fatal accident, is not eaten up by a predator, or does not suffer a killing disease, death still comes as the natural final result of old age.
- B) Aging is defined as the process of progressive deterioration in the structure and function of the cells, tissues and organs of the organism as it grows older. The area of developmental biology which is concerned with the study of the processes of aging is known as gerontology.
- C) Why should an animal age at all? Why do some animals age more rapidly and have a shorter life span than others? Why do different cell types and tissues within the same individual age at different rates? We still do not know enough about the process and causes of aging, although many theories have been proposed to explain this phenomenon.
- D) Some biologists suggest that adverse changes in the environment are the causes of aging in the organisms. Others believe that aging is an intrinsic genetic property of the cells of an organism. According to a compromise theory, aging is due to an interaction between hereditary factors (genes) and the environment. We know, for example, that domestication of animals increases their life span. Another theory proposes that the cells and organisms with a high rate of metabolism age more rapidly and die sooner than those with a relatively lower rate of metabolic activity.
- E) A more recently proposed immunity theory of aging suggests that the decline and disappearance of the thymus gland by late middle age in man is the primary cause of aging. With the disappearance of this gland, the defences of the body against foreign invasion weakens, and, at the same time, the number of defective, abnormal and harmful cells produced in the body itself goes up. This results in increasing damage and destruction of the tissues.
- F) While each theory of aging is supported by some evidence, none of them comprehensively explains this phenomenon. A theory which explains aging in all kinds of organisms can be formulated only when more facts are known about aging processes in a variety of species living under different conditions.

(Adapted from Biology, a textbook for Higher Secondary Schools, Classes XI-XII, NCERT.)

**Check Your Progress 3**

The following questions will help you to understand both the content and the organization of the passage better.

- 1) What title would you give this passage?  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....
- 2) What are the various causes of death mentioned in the passage?  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....
- 3) Which theory, according to the author, explains aging comprehensively? [Choose the correct answer by putting a tick (✓)]:  
 a) The 'compromise' theory according to which hereditary factors and environment play an important role in aging; ( )

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- b) The immunity theory which suggests that the defence mechanism of a human being declines with the disappearance of the thymus gland in middle age; ( )
  - c) The rate of metabolism theory, which propose that organisms with a higher rate of metabolic activity die earlier than those with a lower rate of metabolic activity; ( )
  - d) None of these. ( )

4) What could be the 'foreign invaders' referred to in paragraph E?

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

5) Complete the following notes.

**Notes 2**

Theories of Aging

- 1) Aging a process of .....
- 2) Different theories:
  - i) .....
  - ii) Intrinsic genetic property of the cells.
  - iii) a) Compromise theory — interac<sup>n</sup> .....
  - b) Higher rate of metabolism—hastens process of aging.
  - c) Immunity theory—decline and disappearance of.....
- 3) ..... theory of aging

You will notice that besides using symbols and abbreviations we have also omitted words like *the, a,* and the verb *be (are, is, was, were,* etc.). In note taking such omissions are quite common, because we want to save time. However, in normal writing you must not use any of these shortening devices.

**Example 3**

Read the following passage and find out about the courses, treatment and prevention of breast abscess.

Are the sub-points dependent on the heading or related to each other?

- I) Breast Abscess is a collection of pus in the mammary gland, usually in a woman who is *lactating* (producing milk). Breast abscesses develop if acute *mastitis* (inflammation of the breast, usually due to infection) is not treated promptly with antibiotic drugs. They occur most commonly during the first month after a woman's first delivery.
- II) The initial symptoms are the acute mastitis: the breasts become increasingly tense and tender, and the woman may also develop fever and chills. The abscess develops in one area, which becomes very firm, red and extremely painful.
- III) Simple analgesic drugs, such as paracetamol, provide some relief. The abscess is treated by surgical incision and drainage of the pus under general anesthesia. Breast infections can be prevented by clearing and drying the breasts carefully after each feed. Breast abscesses are less likely to occur if the breasts are emptied regularly, making *engorgement* (overfilling) and the development of mastitis less likely.

(From A complete Family Health Encyclopaedia: the British Medical Association; 1996).

**Check Your Progress 4**

Answer the following questions.

- 1) What heading would you give the above passage?  
 .....

- 2) Match the subheadings in column I with their paragraph numbers in column II.

Column I	Column II
a) Symptoms of Breast Abscess	i) Paragraph I
b) Treatment and Prevention of Breast Abscess	ii) Paragraph II
c) Breast Abscess — Definition and Cause	iii) Paragraph III

- 3) The main ideas which can be noted for the three main sub-headings given in question number 2 are given below. But they are all mixed up. Put them under proper subheadings. One is done for you.

- a) Clearing and drying of breasts after each feed; regular and frequent emptying (bs) of milk.
- b) B Ab. Collection of pus in mammary glands, Usual in nursing mothers.
- c) Simple analgesics; surgical incision.
- d) B. Ab. untreated acute mastitis
- e) Bs. Tender, fever, chill. Ab. in one area- painful.

**Notes 3**

- a) B. Ab. Definition and Cause  
 .....

- b) Symptoms of B. Ab.  
 .....

- c) Treatment and prevention of B. Ab-Cleaning and drying of bs. after each feed  
 .....

Abbreviations used

Bs = Breasts

Ab. = Abscess

glds = glands

Again read Example 3 carefully. The sub-points are arranged under different subheading but you cannot place any subheading anywhere. That is because unless you know what a breast abscess is or what the symptoms are — treatment and prevention has no meaning. Thus you see the points are related to each other.

**Example 4**

Read the following paragraph on the formation of coal.

The process of formation of coal is thought to have begun over 250 million years ago. At that time much of the world was covered with luxuriant vegetation growing in swamps. Many of these plants were types of ferns, some as large as trees. When this vegetation died, it sank into the muddy water, where it gradually decomposed. As decomposition took place, the vegetable matter lost oxygen and hydrogen atoms, leaving a deposit with a

high percentage of carbon. In this way peat bogs were formed. As time passed, layers of sand and mud settled from the water over some of the peat deposits. The pressure of these overlying layers, as well as movements of the earth's crust and sometimes volcanic heat, acted to compress and harden the deposits and raise the carbon content in them, thus producing coal.

*(From Funk and Wagnall's New Encyclopaedia)*

**Check Your Progress 5**

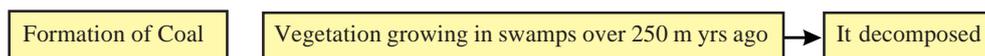
Read the passage carefully and take notes from it, keeping in mind the heading and the subordinate points. Some help is provided for you. Note how the relationship of the subordinate points here is different from that in Notes (3).

**Notes 4**

- (heading) ..... i) .....
- 1) vegetation growing in swamps (over 250m. yrs ago).
- 2) ..... ii) .....
- 3) it decomposed
- 4) decomposition ..... iii) .....
- 5) peat bogs formed
- 6) ..... iv) .....
- 7) ..... v) .....

Check your answers with those given by us at the end of the unit. →

In Notes (4) the sub-points are again arranged vertically, but they cannot be ordered, because each point leads to another. To show clearly that one point leads to another, they can be arranged horizontally, like this:



Some books call these subordinate point links in a chain.

We would suggest that you arrange your notes vertically rather than in spokes or chains. It is, however, useful to know whether the subordinate points in a text are dependent or independent of each other. This will help you read with greater understanding.

Subordinate points that are independent of each other need not all be noted. If one or more is omitted, it will not affect the rest.

Subordinate points that are dependent on each other must all be noted.

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**2.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we have suggested that it is necessary to read with a clear purpose in mind, so that you can separate the essential information in a text from what is repetitive or irrelevant. We have also told you about the techniques of note-taking in terms of

- shortening devices such as abbreviations and symbols, and
- the organisation of notes in terms of headings and subordinate points.

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## 2.7 KEY WORDS

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<b>Abbreviation</b>	:	A few letters instead of the whole word
<b>Condense</b>	:	Put into fewer words
<b>Encyclopaedia</b>	:	A book giving information about every branch of knowledge
<b>Heading</b>	:	Words at the top of a section of written matter
<b>Note</b>	:	A short record made to help the memory
<b>Scan</b>	:	Read carefully for information
<b>Skim</b>	:	To read quickly to understand the main points
<b>Subordinate</b>	:	Less important
<b>Symbol</b>	:	A sign looked upon as representing something

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## 2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

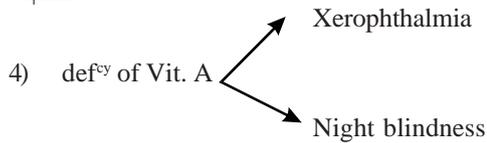
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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) c)
- 2) a) Heart disease is the enemy number one of the human body in our time.
  - b) No proper topic sentence but two types — congenital and rheumatic discussed in detail
  - c) High blood pressure is an important cause.
  - d) Degenerative heart disease—an important problem among adults.
  - e) How does Cholesterol get in the blood?
- 3) a) T
  - b) F
  - c) T
  - d) F
  - e) F
- 4) a) Hypertensive and ischaemic heart diseases.
  - b) A high intake of salt can lead to hypertensive heart disease. A diet rich in fats of animal origin, such as butter, cream, cheese, beef, ham, bacon, egg-yolk and ghee can increase the level of cholesterol in the blood and cause ischaemic heart disease.
- 5) Types of Heart Diseases: Their Causes and Symptoms
- 6) a) Paragraphs A and E
  - b) i)

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) At 4 child begins school.
- 2) e.g. water covers 71% of earth's surface
- 3) Heart dis. 1/2 m. deaths p.a. in U.S.A.



5) Road conditions → higher fuel consump<sup>n</sup> (↔) more pollution

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Theories of Aging
- 2) Accident, being eaten up by a predator, disease, old age.
- 3) d)
- 4) These could be various kinds of disease-causing bacteria, germs, and virus.
- 5)
  - 1) Aging a process of prog<sup>ve</sup> det<sup>n</sup> in structure and function of cells
  - 2) Different theories
    - i) adverse changes in envirmen<sup>t</sup>
    - ii) aging — a genetic property of cells
    - iii)
      - a) Compromise theory — interac<sup>n</sup> between hereditary factor and environment.
      - b) higher rate of metabolism — hastens process of aging
      - c) Immunity theory — decline and disappearance of thymus gland.
  - 3) No comprehensive theory of aging.

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Breast abscess: Causes and Prevention.
- 2)
  - a) ii
  - b) iii
  - c) i
- 3)
  - a) B.ab. Definition and cause—b,d
  - b) Symptoms of B.Ab—e
  - c) Treatment and Prevent<sup>n</sup> of B. Ab—c,a

### Check Your Progress 5

- i) Formation of coal
- ii) When it died, it sank in muddy water
- iii) Loss of O<sub>2</sub> + H atoms in veg. matter → high % of C.
- iv) Sand+mud settled on peat.
- v) Pressure of overlying layers + movements of earth's crust + volcanic heat compress<sup>n</sup> and harden<sup>s</sup> of deposits + more C → coal.

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## 2.9 FURTHER READINGS

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Michael Wallace: *Study Skills in English*, Cambridge-Cambridge University Press.

Sarah Freeman: *Study Strategies in English*, Orient Longman.