SUMMARY WRITING

GCE 'O' Level November 1996 Paper 2

Here's the complete passage taken from the examination paper. Read the passage, and we shall attempt to answer the summary question together.

(The passage describes how the ancient city of Pompeii was destroyed in 79 A.D. by the volcano, Mount Vesuvius, and how its ruins were uncovered centuries later.)

1 In the middle years of the first century A.D., Pompeii was a prosperous and thriving city, only a few days' journey by road from the great city of Rome. It had about 20,000 residents, and was situated on a well-watered coastal plain with particularly fertile soil, bearing three or more crops a year. The climate was gentle, with brief winters, long springs and autumns, and summer days cooled by sea breezes. The nearby sea offered a fine harvest for fishermen. Pompeii lay alongside the Sarno River,
which served as a highway to the interior. While ease and pleasure were very much in the air, the hum of business was always audible. In addition to its role as a trading link between the Italian interior and the outside world, Pompeii was a regional centre for cloth making and dyeing, and a home for many other craftsmen.

2 But the cause of Pompeii's destruction had been present all along. Above it loomed the volcano, Mount Vesuvius, now beginning to stir after centuries of sleep. Vesuvius had concealed its nature well. Rising to a height of only about 2,000 metres, the mountain had given no clear sign of threatening behaviour through all of its recorded history. Its upper slopes were sometimes warm, but this was hardly considered menacing; few people were even aware that it was a volcano. It was innocently cloaked in green, with pastures, orchards and vineyards spreading up its sides. Understandably enough, no legend or folk-tale warned of its darker side: the volcano had not erupted in more than a thousand years.

3 However, all that while, tremendous pressures had been building up far underground. Early in August of 79 A.D., tremors shook the countryside around Vesuvius, accompanied by a deep rumbling sound that signalled the approaching end of the volcano's long repose. Some people gathered their belongings and left for safer ground. They were none too soon. During the very early morning of August 24, with a tremendous crack, the rocky crust that had long sealed the volcano gave way under pressure and was blown into fragments, transforming Mount Vesuvius into a giant cannon, open to the sky. It sent a vast mass of molten rock heavenwards, which then rained down on Pompeii. During the early hours of the eruption, most of the remaining population fled. Yet at least 2,000 people decided to stay, intimidated by what was going on but unwilling to abandon their precious homes and profitable businesses. Soon the volcano demonstrated a new way to kill. A hot cloud of lightweight ash poured down the sides of the mountain, followed by rock fragments made fluid by temperatures as high as

400 degrees Centigrade. Pompeii escaped these avalanches at first, but Vesuvius was still gaining strength and finally took deadly aim at Pompeii, killing every person remaining there. The ash covered everything that was left, burying the city in its final agony.

4 Through time, Pompeii almost completely slipped from the world's memory. Even among scholars, the precise location of Pompeii remained unknown, primarily because a thick flow of molten rock had poured over the area from eruptions in later years. This had entirely altered the shape of the coast. Also, when the digging to uncover the ruins began in the eighteenth century, the debris from these excavations had been left in scattered heaps around the site, further obscuring it. Rainwater, too, collected and had hastened its decay. These early excavators had acted purely for the sake of plunder; they made no genuine effort to investigate the past. This did not come about until the appointment in 1860 of the archaeologist Fiorelli as director of the excavations.

5 Fiorelli set as his goal the total recovery of the vanished city of Pompeii. His approach was the essence of discipline and orderliness. He removed all the debris that had piled up during earlier excavations and installed a drainage system to draw off the rainwater. He differed from previous archaeologists because he was the first to believe that a systematic study of the ruins and all that they contained was essential. Only in this way could their past history be thoroughly understood. After tracing the perimeter walls, he mapped out the site and divided it into districts, identifying individual buildings and carefully numbering them in a logical sequence.

6 Bit by bit, as details accumulated and were pieced together, the long buried past came alive. Because the city and its houses had been taken from the world almost intact, they could be brought back almost whole. As the work proceeded, Fiorelli made sure that every new object that emerged was given a precise description, not just of its appearance and nature, but also of its position in relation to other objects. He insisted that, whenever possible, new discoveries were left in place rather than removed for shipment to a museum or storehouse. Not only interior wall paintings were left intact, but also exterior notices, shop signs and even graffiti.

7 As he worked, he recorded his progress in journals to help future archaeologists, many of whom followed this lead set by Fiorelli. As a result of his excavations, all manner of household items were found: eggs and fish were discovered lying on a dining table, as well as pots containing meat bones. Personal items of every kind turned up, like jewellery, cosmetics, perfume and combs. In a way, voices could be heard as well, as the graffiti that were uncovered gave insight into the lives of the citizens of Pompeii. Among these scribblings on the walls were messages from lovers, personal attacks and casual observations on the world in general. The excavation told a story of ordinary life stopped in its tracks.

8 And then there were the people themselves, recovered by a method that even today still seems almost magical...

9 At Pompeii, volcanic ash had been the cause of a sort of preservation miracle. During the later phases of the eruption, this ash enveloped many of the victims and then solidified around them, leaving body-shaped cavities behind when the flesh decayed. Fiorelli was the first to realise the possibility that there were human remains buried in the ruins of the city, and that their impressions might have been left deep in the sandy covering of volcanic ash.

10 The moment of discovery occurred in February 1863, when a workman accidentally made a hole in a mound at the site. Fiorelli noticed that there was a cavity of some sort. He ordered liquid plaster to be poured, into the cavity and given time to solidify. He had the surrounding ash removed, revealing a complete figure that was uncannily life-like. Eventually, he was responsible for many victims being uncovered by this technique, and people's fascination grew as the intimate details of Pompeii's tragic story were disclosed. The plaster casts fixed the terror and desperation of that long ago disaster in a kind of eternal present.

11 From the first cast created by Fiorelli in 1863 to the many others created by archaeologists since, these frozen images of death send a shock and a jolt to our senses even so many centuries later. The rediscovery of Pompeii is one of archaeology's greatest stories, because from it has come not only an extraordinary scene of disaster but also a precisely detailed and comprehensive picture of life in the classical world. It was the destiny of Pompeii to speak to the future with unsurpassed clarity — a destiny that involved a terrible doom.

© Pompeii: The Vanished City, adapted by permission of Time-Life Books 1992

Now, here is the summary question set on the above passage:

The archaeologist Fiorelli undertook the task of uncovering the ruins of Pompeii.

Using your own words as far as possible, write a summary of the problems he faced when he began his work, what methods he employed to restore the ancient city accurately and how he used the volcanic ash to produce his most dramatic discoveries.

USE ONLY THE MATERIAL FROM PARAGRAPH 4 TO PARAGRAPH 10.

Your summary, which must be in continuous writing (not note form), must not be longer than 150 words, not counting the words given to help you begin.

Begin your summary as follows:
Over the centuries, people had eventually forgotten about Pompeii because…

Here's 3 simple steps to identifying the content points from the passage.

Step 1

Read the question and pick out the key instruction words.

The archaeologist Fiorelli undertook the task of uncovering the ruins of Pompeii.

Using your own words as far as possible, write a summary of the problems he faced when he began his work, what methods he employed to restore the ancient city accurately and how he used the volcanic ash to produce his most dramatic discoveries.

So in short, the question requires you to identify 3 key areas:

1. The problems Fiorelli faced when he began his work.
2. The methods he employed to restore the ancient city accurately.
3. How he used the volcanic ash to produce his most dramatic discoveries.

Step 2

Mark out clearly the area of text to be summarised from the passage.

USE ONLY THE MATERIAL FROM PARAGRAPH 4 TO PARAGRAPH 10.

Step 3

Pick out the content points. Avoid the distractors and elaboration points. Never lose sight of what the question wants!

Distractors: phases or sentences which are irrelevant to the what the question wants.

Elaboration points: phases or sentences which do not form points in themselves, but give extra information as examples or explanations.

Remember that there will be more points available than the number you need to score full marks for content (15 marks). Therefore, ***it is possible to score full marks for content!***

TIPS:

.Organise your content points according to key areas required by the question.

.Use your words as far as possible.

.Use a variety of sentence structures.

.Use linking devices.

.Check that your summary does not have grammar, spelling or punctuation errors.

Congratulations! You have successfully completed this lesson on summary writing!

Keep practising, and remember to use the skills you have learnt here today to write better summaries!