

One of the most difficult tasks in an examination is to be concise, precise and yet at the same time be able to explain something clearly. The skill of 'outlining' something is very under-rated. The best example of outlining is a dictionary or encyclopaedia where world-renowned experts are called upon to draft up precise and clear explanations of a word, term or concept but with the aim of keeping it concise.

Here is an example. The term 'shema' refers to one of the most important prayers in Judaism. Read the following extract written for a dictionary of world religions:

Shema in Judaism. The Shema is a prayer that Jews recite every morning and evening. The word 'Shema' means 'hear' and is the first word of the prayer: 'Hear, O Israel'. It is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy when Moses retells the story of the journey of the Children of Israel through the wilderness: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One' (Deuteronomy 6:4). This is as close as possible to a declaration of faith in what is central to Judaism: that there is only One God who demands total obedience from the people. The prayer was developed as a way of summarising the whole of the Jewish law and is the central focus of Jewish worship. The Shema is the first prayer Jewish children learn and it is taught to them by their parents, thus emphasising the responsibility of parents in passing on the faith to their children. The opening line is also recited at the synagogue as the Torah is taken from the ark on the Sabbath and other festivals. Devout Jews hope that if possible, they will be able to make a final confession on their deathbed, before reciting the Shema. If this isn't possible, then those who are present will recite it on their behalf so that they die affirming the Jewish faith. The Shema is made up of three paragraphs from the Torah: Part 1: Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The prayer begins with the declaration that there is only One God. It then expresses the need for the commandments given by God to be the central focus for life. They are to be taught to the children; they are to be discussed; and they are to be reminded of them by wearing tefillin and fixing mezuzot to the doorpost at home. Part 2: Deuteronomy 11:13-21. The second part of the Shema declares the Jews' acceptance of the commandments as well as undertaking to carry them out as evidence of their loyalty to God. It reminds Jews that human actions make a difference in the world. It repeats many of the themes from the first part, but adds promises of rewards and punishments.

Part 3: Numbers 15:37-41 The third paragraph of the Shema talks about specific things that need to be done, such as the wearing of the tzitzit (fringes) that are worn on the tallit (prayer shawl) during prayer. It also mentions the Exodus from Egypt that Jews are required to remember every day as a reminder of the commands which God gave to them.

(421 words)

This summary is 421 words long but as 'editor', I am only allowed 240 +/- 5 words for my own article. I have highlighted what I would use in my final draft. Look at the editing I have done below:

Shema in Judaism. The Shema is a prayer that Jews recite every morning and evening. The word 'Shema' means 'hear' and is the first word of the prayer: 'Hear, O Israel'. It is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy (6:4) and starts when Moses retells the story of the journey of the Children of Israel through the wilderness: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One' (Deuteronomy 6:4). This is as close as possible to a declaration of faith and in what is central to Judaism: that there is only One God who demands total obedience from the people.

The prayer was developed as a way of summarising the whole of the Jewish law and is the central focus of Jewish worship. The Shema is the first prayer Jewish children learn and it is taught to them by their parents, thus emphasising the responsibility of parents in passing on the faith to their children. The opening line is also recited at the synagogue as the Torah is taken from the ark on the Sabbath and other festivals. Devout Jews hope that if possible, they will be able to make a final confession on their deathbed, before reciting the Shema. If this isn't possible, then those who are present will recite it on their behalf so that they die affirming the Jewish faith. The Shema is made up of three paragraphs from the Torah: Part 1: Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The prayer begins with the declaration that there is only One God. It then expresses the need for the commandments given by God to be the central focus for life. They are to be taught to the children; they are to be discussed; and they are to be reminded of them by wearing tefillin and fixing mezuzot to the doorpost at home. Part 2: Deuteronomy 11:13-21. The second part of the Shema declares the Jews' acceptance of the commandments as well as undertaking to carry them out as evidence of their loyalty to God. It reminds Jews that human actions make a difference in the world. It repeats many of the themes from the first part, but adds promises of rewards and punishments. Part 3: Numbers 15:37-41. The third paragraph of the Shema talks about specific things that need to be done, such as the wearing of the tzitzit (fringes) that are worn on the tallit (prayer shawl) during prayer. It also mentions the Exodus from Egypt that Jews are required to remember every day as a reminder of the commands which God gave to them.

It now reads:

Shema in Judaism. The Shema is a prayer that Jews recite every morning and evening. 'Shema' means 'hear'. It is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy (6:4) and starts: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One'. This is a declaration of faith and central to Judaism: that there is only One God. The prayer is the central focus of Jewish worship. The Shema is the first prayer Jewish children learn and the opening line is also recited as the Torah is taken from the ark on the Sabbath and other festivals. Devout Jews hope to make a final confession on their deathbed, before reciting the Shema. The Shema is made up of three paragraphs. Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The prayer expresses the need for the commandments given by God to be the central focus for life. They are to be reminded of them by wearing tefillin and fixing mezuzot to the doorpost at home. Deuteronomy 11:13-21. declares the Jews' acceptance of the commandments as well as undertaking to carry them out as evidence of their loyalty to God. It reminds Jews that human actions make a difference in the world. Numbers 15:37-41 talks about specific things that need to be done, such as the wearing of the tzitzit (fringes) that are worn on the tallit (prayer shawl) during prayer. It also mentions the Exodus from Egypt that Jews are required to remember every day as the commands which God gave to them.

(244 words)

Now attempt to do similar editing with **'Torah'** using the interactive resource. In an exam you cannot always mention everything so it is always a good exercise to make something more concise but yet still display a high level of understanding. Hopefully, the skills you will be practicing, at first interactively, but then in your own studies and revision will help you extract the best from your wide reading.