

DICTIONARY ENTRY

One of the most difficult skills to master in preparation for examinations 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 encyclopedia where world-renowned experts are called upon to draft a precise and clear explanation of a word, term or concept but with the aim of keeping it concise.

Here is an example. The term 'shahadah' refers to the first Pillar of Islam. Read the following extract written for a dictionary of world religions:

Shahadah: profession of faith in Islam.

The Shahadah is as follows: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." The term 'shahadah' literally means witness, evidence or testimony. It is derived from the terms 'ash-shadu' above ("I declare" or "I bear witness"). Shahadah is the ultimate declaration of faith for Islam. It is more than a creed or statement of belief. It is not just a matter of personal belief, but rather a public testimony of truth. The shahadah is used as a means of recognizing conversion. A convert must repeat the shahadah twice with intent in front of witnesses to become a Muslim. In this sense it is a psychological mechanism reflecting a shift of perspective and a transition in being. Despite being crucial to the act of conversion it is also vital that this state of mind be maintained and a disciplined approach to life follows from it. It is often returned to and 'renewed' daily by Muslims. It is for Muslims a reflection of eternal fact and not simply a 'belief'. Converts repeat this statement twice with sincerity and then they belong to Islam. It is argued that shahadah brings together all the other four Pillars and is the basis for all articles of faith in Islam. It would therefore be a mistake to think of the shahadah as simply something that is there to declare oneself Muslim. The shahadah is there as a constant reminder of the oneness of God, the crucial role of Muhammad as 'seal' of the prophets but most importantly to facilitate God-consciousness. The shahadah puts Allah above all. God is first in one's life as a Muslim. A constant, mindful awareness of this in every aspect and action of daily life is the goal of every Muslim devotee.

DICTIONARY ENTRY

This summary is 300 words long but as 'editor', I am only allowed 180 words for my own article. I have highlighted what I would use in my final draft. Look at the editing I have done below:

Shahadah: profession of faith in Islam.

The Shahadah is as follows: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." The term 'shahadah' literally means witness, evidence or testimony. It is derived from the terms 'ash-shadu' above ("I declare" or "I bear witness"). Shahadah is the ultimate declaration of faith for Islam. It is more than a creed or statement of belief. It is not just a matter of personal belief, but rather a public testimony of truth. The shahadah is used as a means of recognizing conversion. A convert must repeat the shahadah twice with intent in front of witnesses to become a Muslim. In this sense it is a psychological mechanism reflecting a shift of perspective and a transition in being. Despite being crucial to the act of conversion it is also vital that this state of mind be maintained and a disciplined approach to life follows from it. It is often returned to and 'renewed' daily by Muslims. It is for Muslims a reflection of eternal fact and not simply a 'belief'. Converts repeat this statement twice with sincerity and then they belong to Islam. It is argued that shahadah brings together all the other four Pillars and is the basis for all articles of faith in Islam. It would therefore be a mistake to think of the shahadah as simply something that is there to declare oneself Muslim. The shahadah is there as a constant reminder of the oneness of God, the crucial role of Muhammad as 'seal' of the prophets but most importantly to facilitate God-consciousness. The shahadah puts Allah above all. God is first in one's life as a Muslim. A constant, mindful awareness of this in every aspect and action of daily life is the goal of every Muslim devotee.

DICTIONARY ENTRY

It now reads:

Shahadah: profession of faith in Islam.

The Shahadah is: “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” The term ‘shahadah’ literally means witness, evidence or testimony. It is derived from the terms ‘ash-shadu’ above (“I declare” or “I bear witness”). Shahadah is the declaration of faith. It is not just a matter of personal belief, but rather a public testimony of truth. The shahadah is used as a means of recognizing conversion. A convert must repeat the shahadah twice with intent in front of witnesses to become a Muslim. It is often ‘renewed’ daily by Muslims. Converts repeat this statement with sincerity and then they belong to Islam. The shahadah is there as a constant reminder of the oneness of God, the crucial role of Muhammad as ‘seal’ of the prophets but most importantly to facilitate God-consciousness. The shahadah puts Allah above all. God is first in one’s life as a Muslim. A constant, mindful awareness of this in every aspect and action of daily life is the goal of every Muslim devotee. **(178 words)**

Today you will all do similar editing with Tawhid. 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 practising, at first interactively, but then in your own studies and revision will help you extract the best from your wide reading.