

Teaching Pack

Summary skills

Cambridge IGCSE™ / IGCSE (9-1)
First Language English






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Introduction

This *Teaching Pack* focuses on supporting learners to develop the skills required for a selective summary task.

The lessons presented here are designed for learners who already understand that a summary requires them to be able to take what is written or said, and condense it down to its main points. Each lesson can be presented individually, extended and/or split into two or three shorter sessions to accommodate differing timetable requirements.

It is expected that learners should already know that a written summary response should be a concise, easy to read text, be written in their own words and use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Learners should understand that they must provide alternatives where appropriate for vocabulary used in the text in order to avoid copying from the original. They should also be aware of some of the ways in which they can link together the key points they have identified.



Lesson plan 1: Identify and select





Resources


- **Worksheet 1:** Top tips for summary writing
- **Worksheet 2:** Childhood obesity
- **Worksheet 3:** Who, What, When, Where, Why?

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson learners will be able to:

- reflect on what makes a successful selective summary
- identify explicit and implicit ideas and attitudes in a text

Timings	Activity
 10 min	Starter / Introduction Task: Distribute Worksheet 1 . In pairs, ask learners to consider what they might need to include when writing a successful summary. Encourage learners to feed back this information and record some answers on the board. This could then become the class success criteria for summary writing. Learners should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should they organise and structure their writing? • How much detail should they include in their writing? • How much of their summary should be their own words? • What vocabulary should they use?
 10 min	Main lesson Task: Divide learners into groups of four. Learners read Worksheet 2 either as a whole group or individually. While reading Worksheet 2 learners should find the following key words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evolving • hyperprocessed • controversial • overwhelming • perceive
 10 min	In their groups, learners try to come up with a different way to say those words. Learners should try to keep their responses quite short, using simple language to express their ideas. Ask each group to share one of their responses and ask the rest of the class to evaluate whether this was effective. If another group feels that their definition is clearer then they can share their ideas with the class.
 15 min	Mini-plenary: Learners re-read the text and then create a group summary of the whole text in one sentence. Task: Distribute Worksheet 3 to each group. As a group, learners should identify the details in the text that answer the questions. They should then answer the question in their own words and then record the evidence they have found from the text. Highlight or underline details in the text that answer the questions. One half of the group could highlight and identify the details and the other half could record the answers on the

Timings	Activity
	<p>worksheet. Remind learners that they may have to use some inference skills to locate specific details.</p> <p>In their groups, learners use the information from the text on Worksheet 2 and the details they've collected on Worksheet 3 to answer the questions:</p> <p><i>How is the food industry contributing to childhood obesity? What steps can we take to prevent this?</i></p> <p>Learners can further highlight and annotate the text so that they can explain their thoughts as they read.</p> <p>When learners have collected the information from the text, they can verbally share the information they have found out. Then learners work together to create a summary of no more than 120 words that addresses the two questions. Remind learners that they should use continuous writing and their own words as far as possible.</p>
	<p>Plenary</p> <p>Task: Re-read paragraph 7, 'The bliss point...' Identify two health problems that are associated with eating sugary, salty and fatty foods.</p> <p>Homework</p> <p>Learners select a favourite or well-known book or film. They summarise this book or film in no more than 150 words and bring this summary to the next lesson.</p>

Lesson 1 Teacher's notes



Key words / concepts you could highlight during the lesson, or have pre-taught before the lesson:

- **explicit ideas** – something that is clearly stated and leaves nothing implied.
- **implicit ideas** – something that is suggested and not directly expressed.

Starter

The starter allows learners to reflect on their knowledge of what makes a good summary. It means that learners can create a success criteria that they can use in their writing and in other future lessons. Make sure learners comment not just on what they need to include in the content of the summary but how they should structure their piece of writing also.

Main lesson

Learners should rewrite the following words in their own words. These should not be definitions, rather they should be alternative ways of expressing the words below. We have given some suggestions but any valid suggestions made by your learners would be acceptable.

- **Evolving**: changing and developing
- **Hyperprocessed**: very heavily processed
- **Controversial**: a topic or subject that causes disagreement or argument
- **Overwhelming**: very large amount
- **Perceive**: view or realise something.

Text

This text is from the New Zealand Herald and is about the obesity crisis facing children and families. The author lists the various contributing factors that are making the obesity crisis worse.

Homework

This homework asks learners to find a film or book that they like or are familiar with and create a short summary about this. Learners should then bring their summaries to share with their classmates in the following lesson.



Lesson plan 2: Organisation and overview



Resources


- **Worksheet 4:** Aspects of Writing – we need to talk about spelling
- **Worksheet 5:** *Aspects of Writing* - questions
- **Worksheet 6:** What is the text about?
- Five different coloured highlighters (1 per group)

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson learners will be able to:

- select key details from a text
- respond to a range of question types

Timings	Activity
 10 min	<p>Starter / Introduction</p> <p>Task: Ask learners to share their homework summaries. Learners can either talk in pairs, small groups or you could allow learners to walk around the classroom to share their summaries. Learners should take turns to verbally share their summaries with one another without revealing the title of their summary. Then learners try to guess each other's film or book.</p>
 40 min	<p>Main lesson</p> <p>Task: Put learners into groups of 5–6 and give each group a copy of Worksheet 4. It would be useful if these could be printed on A3 paper so that all learners can access the text. If this is not possible, then you could print two copies of the text per group.</p> <p>Using Worksheet 5, learners select the relevant details from the text to respond to the questions.</p> <p>When learners get to question D:</p> <p><i>According to the text, what are the main issues with spelling, punctuation and grammar for GCSE students and what can teachers do to help this situation?</i></p> <p>Learners can summarise their text, thinking about the focus of the questions. Remind learners that they should use their own words and that they should structure their work so that it is clear to the audience. Learners may need to highlight and annotate some key details in the text to find answers for the questions above.</p> <p>Learners swap their summaries with another group to peer assess each other's work.</p>

Timings	Activity
	<p>Plenary</p> <p>Create a line of agreement in your classroom. One side of the classroom should be called ‘strongly agree’ and the other side should be ‘strongly disagree’. Give learners one of the controversial statements below and ask them to line up to show their thoughts and feelings about the statement. Learners can choose to stand on whichever side of the room best represents how they feel, or they could choose any space in the middle of the room. Remind learners that they need to be able to back up their opinions with reasons.</p> <p><i>Correct spelling, punctuation and grammar is less important today than it has ever been; people don’t care if you can spell.</i></p> <p><i>Social media has made young people lazy with correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.</i></p> <p>Homework</p> <p>Distribute Worksheet 6 and ask learners to read the three short stories. They then select the option that best summarises what each story is about. Learners can share their ideas, explaining how and why they came to that decision.</p>



Lesson 2 Teacher's notes

Key words / concepts you could highlight during the lesson, or have pre-taught before the lesson:

- **audience** – who the text is written for. This can be general, e.g. 'women', or can be more specific, 'women in their early 20s who are interested in rock climbing'.
- **purpose** – why the text has been written. This can be to describe, persuade, inform, entertain, narrate, etc.

Starter

Learners should walk around the classroom, finding another learner to share their homework summary with. Learners should then try to guess what film or book their partner's summary is describing.

Main lesson

The text in this lesson is from a report by Cambridge Assessment which explores different aspects of writing such as spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and the use of paragraphs. The report had been carried out every 10 years since the 1980s and explores changes in a wide range of students' writing in formal English exams. The report looks at how these aspects of writing have changed and offers teachers some solutions for how they might tackle these issues if their learners appear to be struggling with written English.

Learners may have some opinions about the issues raised in the text so this could be a good opportunity to create a speaking and listening activity where learners can debate ideas around grammar and 'correct' use of Standard English in a modern day context. You could use some of the strategies mentioned in any of the *Speaking and listening Teaching Packs*.

Plenary

This teaching tool is designed to make learners move around the room and visibly show their opinions rather than writing them down. This activity works best with controversial statements that mean learners have to choose a side and then defend their point. You can use the controversial statements that we have suggested or you can of course use your own statements.

Lesson plan 3: Selection and structure






Resources



- **Worksheet 7:** The popularity of overpriced Center Parcs is truly baffling
- **Worksheet 8:** Summary Venn diagram
- **Worksheet 9:** The Dutch alternative to Center Parcs has arrived in Britain – but is it any good?

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson:

- all learners will be able to identify and summarise a number of explicit and implicit ideas from a longer text
- most learners will be able to select carefully a range of ideas and structure their response helpfully to communicate understanding
- some learners will be able to skilfully select only ideas relevant to the given focus and craft their response for the benefit of their reader

Timings	Activity
  	<p>Starter / Introduction</p> <p>Task: Distribute Worksheet 7. Learners read this article (either independently or led by you) and write down <i>five</i> questions about the article that relate to the 5Ws (one for each of: Who, What, When, Where, Why/How).</p> <p>Put learners into pairs to share and compare their questions. As a pair, learners decide on their most effective questions to check someone's understanding of the main ideas in the text.</p> <p>Learners may come up with the following questions. If learners need support, you could offer some of the following questions as prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is writing? • Where are they? • When are they writing? • How has the situation come about? • Why are they writing this article? • Who else is mentioned in the article? • What details are described? <p>Learners could then share their examples of questions with the rest of the class who could try to answer them. If a pair asks a question that is incorrect or irrelevant then the rest of the class could offer suggestions for how to improve this.</p>

Timings	Activity
	<p>Main lesson</p> <p>Task: In pairs or small groups, learners now re-read the text and highlight key quotes and evidence that answer these questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What might appeal to someone visiting Centre Parcs for the first time? 2. Why would Centre Parcs not appeal to families? 3. What facilities are available at Centre Parcs? <p>Using Worksheet 8, learners record their ideas in the relevant sections to identify where there are overlaps/differences. In their notes, learners should not use direct quotations but summarise their ideas in their own words. Learners may use bullet point notes to record their ideas.</p> <p>Learners complete the selective summary task as an independent task. Remind learners that their summary should not be more than 120 words and that they can use Worksheet 1 (from Lesson 1) to help them.</p> <p>Learners review their response for clarity, concision and content and indicate in a different colour pen any changes they need to make.</p>
	<p>Plenary</p> <p>Learners mark each other's tasks to say what their partner has done well and what their partner could do to improve their response. If there is time, learners could redraft their selective summaries to act on what their partner has suggested.</p> <p>Homework options and/or further extension activities:</p> <p>Learners should read Worksheet 9 (or learners could find their own examples of suitable texts about a topic that interests them. It may be useful for learners to tell you what they are planning to research or for you to give learners a list of topics) and create their own summary question.</p>



Lesson 3 Teacher's notes

Starter

This starter encourages learners to reflect on a text by constructing their own questions about *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why/how*. This activity means that learners need to think about how they might approach analysis in the future. This helps learners to be specific when selecting certain details, but also helps learners to answer their own questions whilst thinking about them.

Worksheet 7

This text is written about Centre Parcs, a European company that has created a series of holiday villages, usually in woods and forests. Centre Parcs UK provide short holidays and provide a range of outdoor, active and leisure pursuits for both adults and families. Here, the author describes some of the negatives of visiting Centre Parcs, listing aspects such as cost, food and design.

Worksheet 8

This Venn diagram is a visual organiser that allows learners to select details and record them in separate areas so that they can practice reading for purpose, whilst also allowing learners to see how their ideas might overlap or be connected and how they might use these points in their summaries.

Next steps/ Taking it further

Here we have offered some ideas for how learners might develop the ideas covered in this lesson. Learners could then discuss how these styles of writing are different from a summary.

- A letter to a friend advising them whether they should/shouldn't go to Centre Parcs
- A newspaper article on Centre Parcs style holidays in the twentieth century
- A speech to a specified audience objecting to a Centre Parcs being built in the local vicinity /country
- An interview of a teenager who didn't enjoy their stay at Centre Parcs
- A report about customer complaints
- Descriptive writing: A holiday in the forest.
- Narrative writing: 'It will be great,' said Mum as we arrived at the door of the wooden lodge...

Lesson resources



Worksheet 1: Top tips for summary writing

Worksheet 2: Childhood obesity

Worksheet 3: Who, What, When, Where, Why?

Worksheet 4: Aspects of Writing – we need to talk about spelling

Worksheet 5: *Aspects of Writing* - questions

Worksheet 6: What is the text about?

Worksheet 7: The popularity of overpriced Center Parcs is truly baffling

Worksheet 8: Summary Venn diagram

Worksheet 9: The Dutch alternative to Center Parcs has arrived in Britain – but is it any good?

Worksheet 1: Top tips for summary writing



What are the first things to consider when writing a summary?

Common mistakes are:

Next think about:

To be successful you should:



Worksheet 2: Childhood obesity

This is an article from the New Zealand Herald. It was originally published on 19th May 2014 and details some of the factors that contribute to childhood obesity. It also outlines the health implications that childhood obesity can have...

An evolving health crisis of childhood obesity is upon us. Is this the generation where children are condemned to live shorter lives than their parents? Dave Shaw investigates.

Countless factors have led us here, with nutrition playing a major role. Many foods now advertised to kids are higher in sugar, salt and fat than those targeted at young generations before. Children are hardwired to fall for these flavours. The food industry is arguably exploiting the biology – and psychology – of children.

They aren't just providing a source of calories and nutrients for a child, they're impacting their health in a way that could warrant future legal action. Many children are growing up believing food should be served deep-fried and sugar-coated. Is this ethical? If other countries were causing havoc on our children's health like this, then we'd put a stop to it.

A film shedding light on this topic is *Fed Up* which may be the most important documentary in recent times. The film essentially says we have a problem, a problem that many vested interests have no intention of solving and a problem that must be dealt with if we're interested in our survival.

In the food industry's defence, they are giving us what we want and if we ask for healthier foods, they will provide. But in the end, profits come first.

Here's a heads up about some food industry insights that may be affecting you and your family.

The bliss point: This is the perfect amount of sugar – of salt and fat – that allows a food to become highly salient¹. When these tastes combine, they provide a dopamine-fuelled rush driving us to eat more. It's no surprise children want to eat more of the food that tastes good. Unfortunately, the high consumption of sugary, salty and fatty foods can lead to obesity, metabolic syndrome, diabetes or much worse.

Hyperprocessed food: there are many heavy hitting facts about the harms of eating too much sugary and other hyperprocessed foods, yet many of us continue to buy, serve and eat them every day. There is no difference between some processed food and sugar itself. Saying you can eat a bowl of cornflakes with no added sugar or a bowl of sugar with no added cornflakes can be essentially the same thing.

'Eater'-tainment: The food industry has learned what humans want and is only too happy to oblige. At every eating opportunity or on every street corner awaits a sugary or salty snack made to satisfy our craving. It's what people of all ages gorge on to feel good for a few moments or to relax. Who doesn't want to get on this ride, right? And when we do, we are only more than tempted to ride it again and again.

Marketing: The marketing of children's food is a controversial topic, with many companies under siege for how they promote their food to youngsters. Children often don't know the difference between

¹ *Salient*: flavoursome and appealing

good and bad food and have to rely on others to tell them – usually their parents. But when they see the Golden Arches² or colourful packages covered in cartoons they immediately connect with a product. After tasting the addictive combination of sugar, salt and fat, the marketing image is permanently engraved on their mind. Suddenly they want more.

Maternal disempowerment: What does a mother do when she has the difficult choice of giving her child what they want or giving them what's the best for their health? This is a common struggle against an overwhelming tide of marketing and, possibly, addiction. Sometimes even the parents don't know what's best, so who's left to pick up the reins? Parents, and their children, need to be educated on what are the healthier options, and the healthier choice must become the easier choice.

Public misperception: A fast food diet should not be socially accepted, but it is. So, the real goal is to change how we view food. The government has a role to play, but if we look at the great public health successes, they come from changes in how we perceive a product. Smoking for example is now seen as deadly and disgusting, when it was once sexy. If you look at something and say, "that's horrible, I'd rather have something else," you're not going to feel drawn to eat it. We can apply this learning to how we eat. We need to take the power out of certain foods: from there saying "no" to eating junk is easy.

² *Golden Arches*: the trademark of an international hamburger chain

Worksheet 3: Who, What, When, Where, Why

	Answer	Evidence
Who is the article talking about?		
What is the problem?		
When is this article set?		
Where is this article from?		
Why should we do something?		



Worksheet 4: Aspects of Writing – We need to talk about spelling

Alex Quigley, English teacher, author of 'The Confident Teacher', and Director of Huntington Research School, York pulls out some key takeaways for teachers from the latest phase of our unique study [#AspectsOfWriting](#).

Cambridge Assessment released the latest phase of the 'Aspects of Writing' study on Wednesday to much interest. The full title of the research is the less tabloid-friendly 'Variations in aspects of writing in 16+ English Examinations between 1980 to 2014', but the headlines came thick and fast. The Daily Mail gave us: 'Sign off the times: GCSE pupils make more spelling mistakes than their parents' generation and often cannot spell 'too', 'of' and 'said'. Whereas The Times furnished us with: 'Oh my word: GCSE pupils can't spell 'off''. Answers to the problem quickly raced to blaming the government for failed initiatives in "drilling punctuation", to blaming Facebook and other forms of social media. The truth behind the research is – typically – much more subtle than the grand-standing headlines, but no less interesting.

First, it is important to apply the caution that Cambridge Assessment assigns to their study: it is a "finger in the wind indication of 16 year olds' writing." The grand decline in spelling and writing standards is not so marked. Yes, errors are more frequent in the most recent writing sample (it is important to note it was the Cambridge IGCSE examination – a high-stakes assessment under pressured timed conditions) from 2014, when compared to 1980, but many of the changes are not as marked as suggested in the headlines. The crucial findings about the suggested decline in spelling, as reported by the media, was that spelling errors increased only among students with grades below a D grade – and not all students. It is unsurprising to me, as a long-standing English teacher, that E grade and F grade students are making few inroads into spelling during exam conditions.

Other interesting writing patterns emerge from the research:

- Sentence length, measured by the number of words, showed the highest attaining students wrote shorter sentences on average (A* - 16.8 words, compared to C - 17.7 words, D - 23.4 words and F - 28.3 words).
- Capital letters slid somewhat, with low attaining students making a greater number of capital letters errors at the start of sentences than in previous years.
- There were fewer comma splices, suggesting an improvement in the use of commas.
- There was an increase in the use of 'other' punctuation (other than full stops, commas or apostrophes) by high attaining students, but the opposite is true for low attaining students.
- Paragraphing: the number of paragraphs used by students has increased with attainment in 2004, 2007 and 2014.
- There was an increase in the use of simple sentences, with a lower incidence of multiple sentences, along with less subordination, showing a trend toward fewer complex sentence structures being used by all students.
- The high attaining students improved their proportion of 'sophisticated vocabulary' compared to 2007 (but not as high as 2004).

So what can we take away from this evidence? First, I would say that the dizzying merry-go-round of government writing initiatives, charted by the researchers, really does little to change the

Worksheet 4: Aspects of Writing – We need to talk about spelling *continued*



fundamental writing patterns of our teens. Policy makers should consider more sustainable curriculum change in schools, with concurrent training for teachers, to improve upon the subtle nuances of writing that emerge from such studies. Also, we should reflect on changes in technology etc., but avoid quick blame for the 'Facebook effect' on all of our writing ills, as the evidence is slim in this regard. Despite the shoddy standard of writing on Facebook and more, there isn't much evidence to show that 'text-speak' was rife, nor that students were unable to understand how to shift the formality and style of their writing across different contexts.

What can teachers take away from the study? Here are some prompts:

- How strong is our understanding, as teachers, of developing students to become accurate writers – particularly those lowest attaining students?
- How consistent are we in teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar across English departments and also across the whole school?
- How do we support our lower attaining students to craft their sentences more, use more paragraphs and deploy a wider range of punctuation (those crucial aspects of writing from high attaining students)?

Alex Quigley

English teacher, author of 'The Confident Teacher', and Director of Huntington Research School, York



Worksheet 5: *Aspects of Writing* – questions

A. Give two examples of things that were blamed for bad punctuation:

-
-

B. Using your own words, explain what the text means by:

- i. 'the headlines came thick and fast'
- ii. 'raced to blaming the government'

C. Re-read paragraph 3 'So what can we take away...'

- i. Identify two suggestions made in the text for improving the teenager's writing:
 -
 -
- ii. Explain why people blame Facebook and social media for poor spelling and grammar.

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D. According to the text, what are the main issues with spelling, punctuation and grammar in GCSE students **and** what can teachers do to help this situation?

You must **use continuous writing** (not note form) and **use your own words** as far as possible. Your summary should be not more than 120 words.



Worksheet 6: What is the text about?

Read through the following short stories and select the statement that best summarises what the text is about. You should be able to explain why you have made that choice, backing up your ideas with evidence.

1. Lester was lost. He didn't know where he was, or how to get where he was going. He had left the directions at home and he didn't have a map. Now, he was in a strange neighbourhood and he was confused. If he could find a familiar landmark, he might figure things out.
 - Wanting a map
 - Lester was lost
 - Getting directions
 - Going to a party
2. Baseball has been a part of American life for more than 100 years. There are 29 professional teams in 27 American cities and hundreds of minor league teams throughout the 50 states. More Americans attend major league baseball games than any other professional team sport in the United States. Baseball is a part of American slang, fashion, music, and movies.
 - Baseball stadiums
 - Baseball in America
 - Minor league baseball
 - Baseball slang
3. For most of us, getting older means getting better. We might not have as much energy as we used to, but we know how to use it more efficiently. We think more clearly. We have more experience and get less intimidated. We're more focused on what we love best. That's what maturity is all about.
 - A bad situation
 - Problems of the elderly
 - Getting more experience
 - Positive side of maturity



Worksheet 7: The popularity of overpriced Center Parcs is truly baffling

The first time I went to Center Parcs, I told my children we were off to spend a weekend in the forest. Being fans of Winnie the Pooh, they were excited.

The second time we visited, we had no such illusions; we were heading for a weekend of high prices at a really rather suburban campus, set in what is, at best, a decidedly bijou wood.

Center Parcs occupies a solid position in the British middle class portfolio of what constitutes a family holiday. And yet, its tendency to disappoint in areas of cost, design and food is consistent.

The cost

A weekend break at the new Waterside Lodges at Elveden Forest starts - starts! - at £1,999 for a family of three this month. And that's self-catering.

Sure, that's the highest end of the British group's accommodation. But it's also equivalent to the cost of a suite at one of Britain's best hotels.

And the lower end of Center Parcs housing isn't cheap, either. Three nights (for you must book a minimum of three nights, which is awkward during term time) at the Sherwood Forest campus in late November costs from £579 for two adults and a child. And that's before you have booked anything else.

The add-ons add up at Center Parcs. For example, bicycles are virtually essential when navigating the spread out car-free campus, particularly if you are with young children who do not stroll. But hiring them adds significantly to your mini-break costs: at £30 for an adult bike and £22 for a child's cycle, you're adding more than £100 to your bill for a family of four before you've even arrived. If you want to visit the gym, unlike at a hotel, it's another £13.

As the costs add up, you long for a free-of-charge, unstructured moment in an unlandscaped wood.

The design

And that is the second sin of Center Parcs: marketed as luxury lodges set in 400 acres of "natural landscapes" across Britain (there are locations in Cumbria, Nottinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Suffolk and Wiltshire, with the group's first Irish park coming next year), the reality is more like a suburban estate. Long walks from identikit lodges take you to shopping and activity hubs which feel like shopping malls.

The well-maintained lodges are spacious and functional, upholstered in various woods, plastics and synthetic fabrics that can withstand the hard wear of young children. But there is nothing here to interest the aesthete. And there's little to lure the outdoorsman, either. You and your family are not embarking on a Thoreauvian deliberate, woodland life; for all of its marketing as time away in the woods, this is not a place for kids to wildly pursue their independent adventures; it's a place to book slots far in advance: organised leisure. In the same way that you know what you're getting with a mid-level chain restaurant – Center Parcs delivers a consistent but predictable product.

The food

And chains are what the group banks on: the on-site restaurants – a key detail for such a captive audience – are a disappointing line-up of the blandest of the high street. But while you may feel as if you're dining in your local high street, you will note inflated prices at Center Parcs – as much as 60 per cent more than what the same dish would cost in a city centre outlet of the chain.

Parenting chat groups are full of advice to head to the Continent over British versions (the Center Parcs concept originated in Holland in 1967, with the first UK outlet opening in 1987. Center Parcs is now a separate entity in the UK). Prices in the Netherlands and Germany in particular (there are also parks in France and Belgium and plans to open in China) can cost half as much as the same amount of time in a UK park. You can also save money by booking far in advance which, indeed, most people do in order to get the lodge location and activities that they want.

Worksheet 7: The popularity of overpriced Center Parcs is truly baffling – *continued*



Is it worth visiting Center Parcs?

Center Parcs' popularity endures: occupancy levels are high, and 2.2 million visitors flock to the parks each year in Britain. I find this baffling.

Perhaps most peculiar is Center Parcs' popularity with hen and stag parties. The Woburn campus, which is closest to London and has the group's largest spa, is particularly a draw for the former. If a spa is what you're after, stay in London, where you have half a chance of a nice meal after a day in the sauna.

If a weekend in the woods is what you crave, again, I'd head elsewhere. For the money, I'd hire a truly well-designed cottage in a pretty part of the countryside and book a morning at Go Ape instead.

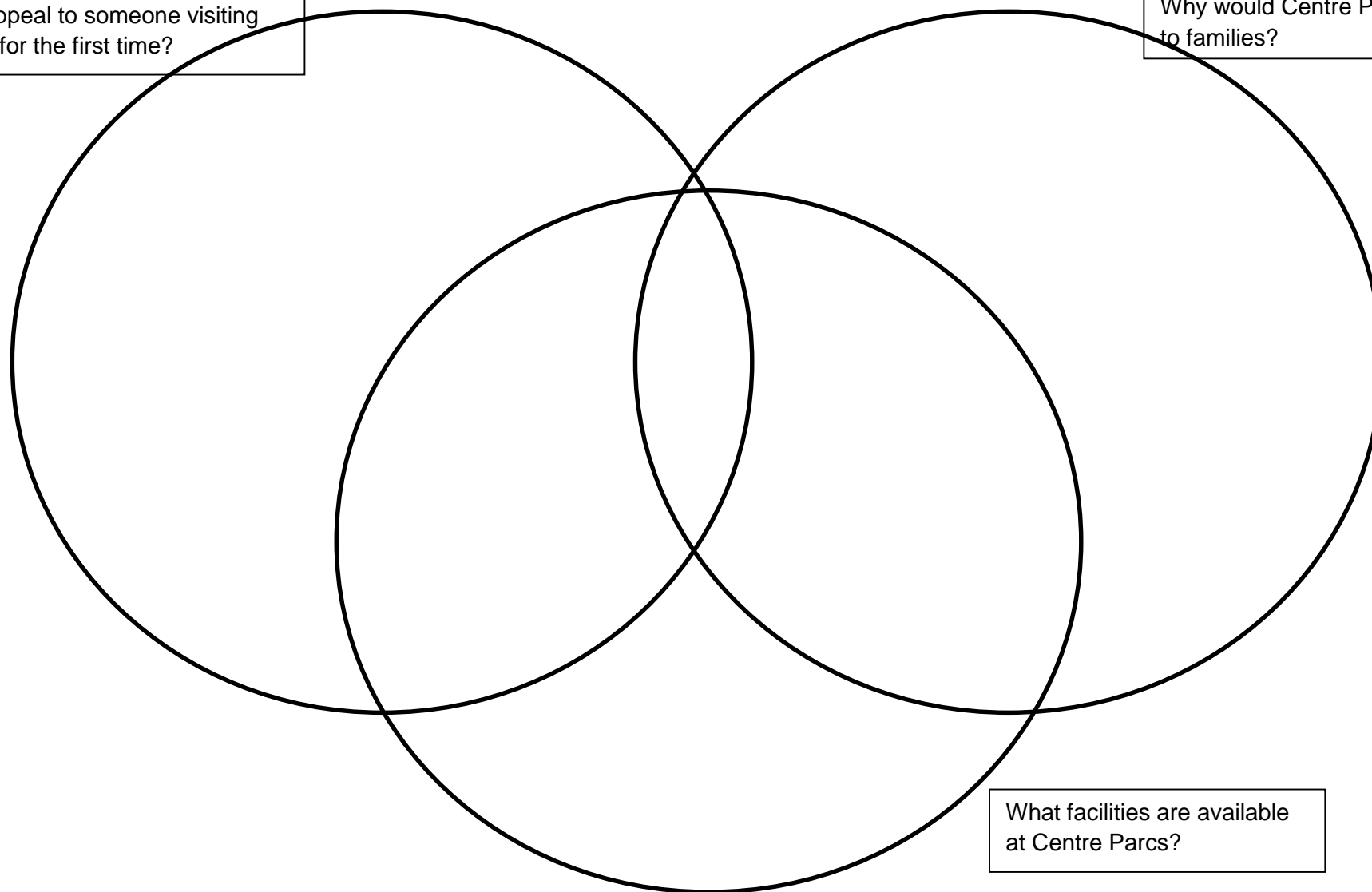
Where Center Parcs shines is in its activities staff: these young, bright and engaging people have a Disney-like zeal for entertaining children, particularly aged around four to eight. So if what you want is to outsource the childcare for a weekend, book far in advance. And bring a friend, because there is very little for adults to do here, while they're busy avoiding their own kids.

Worksheet 8: Summary Venn diagram



What might appeal to someone visiting Centre Parcs for the first time?

Why would Centre Parcs not appeal to families?



What facilities are available at Centre Parcs?

Worksheet 9: The Dutch alternative to Center Parcs has arrived in Britain – but is it any good?



Landal Greenparks is perfect for a short family break and connecting with nature – without sacrificing the home comforts.

Best for: Multi-generational family groups

Worst for: Families with kids who like a busy, structured activity programme

“En garde!” Our instructor threw down the gauntlet and my two daughters, padded up like a couple of navy-blue ninjas, dashed to pick it up. A flash of foil here, a lunge there and dad was soon left huffing and puffing while Maya, 11, and Olivia, 7, ran rings around me with a couple of bendy swords.

Gina, our instructor, observed: “It’s just like a scene from *Pirates of the Caribbean*.” If so, I was definitely more Keith Richards than Orlando Bloom.

Fencing is just one of the timetabled activities at Landal. The Dutch-owned group opened its first British campuses at the start of this year, in the Peak District and Northumberland. The company pitches its family breaks, based on a four-night midweek or three-night weekend holiday, squarely between Forest Holidays and Center Parcs. Think a range of pine-built lodges, on-site activities and some mobile-signal-free time in nature.

We were spending a busy spring bank holiday at Landal Darwin Forest, a wooded site in the rolling hills of the Peak District National Park. Unlike other holiday parks, Landal encourages visitors to stray beyond the front gate and explore the local area — hence discounted tickets at reception for nearby Chatsworth House and flyers for the food festival in the charming nearby town of Bakewell.

But, primarily, we were here for some family quiet time. Like most of the visitors that weekend, we had driven within a three-hour radius of home but, we found, they were more savvy to the holiday park model: fellow guests had pre-booked activities and dinner reservations, as well as stocking up on supplies en-route to the park.

We were less well prepared, and ate primarily at Foresters Bar and Restaurant, which served decent pub-grub style food at pub prices, albeit with a slightly limited menu. The three options on the kids’ menu were quickly exhausted after a weekend of lunches and dinners.

Our accommodation for the weekend was an attractive pine lodge with open-plan kitchen-living-dining area, a mix of twin and double bedrooms and a rustic decking area outside. The Chatsworth Elite lodge style was spacious, homely and warm on a chilly evening, sleeping up to eight people. Cheaper options offer less space, while top-of-the-range lodges come with outdoor hot tubs.

The park publishes a weekly timetable of activities, many based at the Evolution pool and health centre, and encourages visiting families to try offbeat sports. All these are charged as extra and are held at fixed times. So if you fancy hurling yourself around the grounds in a giant bubble, you must plan ahead for BodyZorbing (ages six+, £8pp). My girls were disappointed that a WaterWalkerz session (ages five+, £5pp) was cancelled on us at short notice due to lack of numbers.

Outside of timetabled activities, there’s a soft-play centre for toddlers and exercise classes for adults in the small on-site gym, the use of which, as with the pool, is free of charge.

I noticed during the weekend that many of the visitors were multi-generational groups and Landal is a good option for extended families. Not only can grandparents keep an eye on kids while parents catch a spa treatment, but it also offers parents the welcome prospect of sampling some of the excellent local microbrewery ales at a country pub one evening. With no organised childcare on site, the best I could manage was a short but welcome express back rub (£22) while the girls were engaged in an activity nearby.

Back at the fencing session, the girls perfected their swordplay. Captain Jack Sparrow better watch his back. There's a couple of swashbuckling young ladies with newfound penchant for a parry on his trail.

Landal (landal.co.uk) prices from £299 (weekend) and £449 (midweek), based on a family of four in a Haddon Classic 2 lodge, excluding meals and activities.

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