

The Rhetorical Précis

Overview: In order to concisely describe the argument and context an author presents in a text, academic writers sometimes use a format called the *rhetorical précis*. This form is a **highly structured four-sentence paragraph** that highlights the essential rhetorical elements in any text. The *précis* includes the name of the speaker/writer(s), the context or situation in which the text is delivered, the major assertion, the mode of development or support of the main idea, the stated and/or apparent purpose of the text, and the relationship between the writer(s) and the audience. The following is a breakdown of the information to include in each of the four sentences.

<p>SENTENCE 1 – include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the name of author, • a phrase describing the author’s credentials, • the type and title of work, the date of work (inserted in parentheses), • a <u>rhetorically accurate</u> verb (such as “assert,” “argue,” “suggest,” “imply,” “claim,” “posit,” etc.) that describes what the author is doing in the text, • a THAT clause in which you state the major assertion (thesis statement/claim) of the author’s text. 	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>Toni Morrison, a well-known scholar in the humanities, in her essay, “Disturbing Nurses and the Kindness of Sharks,” implies THAT racism in the United States has affected the craft and process of American novelists.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 2 : An explanation of <u>how</u> the author develops and/or supports the thesis (for instance, <i>comparing and contrasting, defining, narrating, illustrating, defining, using humor or sarcasm, relating personal experience, depending on facts /statistics /opinion, etc.</i>). Consider the author’s organization, use of evidence, and/or strategies used to construct his/her argument. Your explanation is usually presented in the same chronological order that the items of support are presented in the work.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>Morrison supports her implication by describing how Ernest Hemingway writes about black characters and by illustrating his strategies for plot development seen within his novels and short stories.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 3: A statement of the author’s apparent purpose, followed by an IN ORDER TO phrase in which you explain what the author wants the audience to do or feel as a result of reading the work.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>Her purpose is to make her readers aware of the cruel reality of racism underlying some of the greatest works of American literature IN ORDER TO help them examine the far-reaching effects racism has not only on those discriminated against but also on those who discriminate.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 4: A description of the intended audience and the relationship the author establishes with the audience.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>She establishes a formal and highly analytical tone with her audience of racially-mixed, theoretically-sophisticated readers and critical interpreters of American literature.</p>

Templates for the Rhetorical Précis

Provided below are three templates you can refer to when using the rhetorical précis form. You should use these for guidance, but use your best judgment about how to form sentences appropriate to the text and/or author you write about. The model is a back-up, not a requirement.

1. (Author's credentials), (author's first and last name), **in his/her** (type of text), (title of text), **published in** (publishing info), **addresses the topic of** (topic of text) **and argues that** (argument).
2. **S/he supports this claim by** _____, **then** _____, **and finally** _____.
3. (Author's last name)'s **purpose is to** (author's purpose in writing) **in order to** (change in reader/society the author wants to achieve).
4. **He/she adopts a(n)** _____ **tone for his/her audience, the readers of** (publication) **and others interested in the topic of** _____.

1. **In the** (type of text), (title of text) (year), **author** (author's first and last name), (author's credentials), **asserts that** (argument) **and suggests** (explanation of sub-claims or resolution).
2. **S/he backs up this claim by doing the following: first, s/he** _____; **next, s/he** _____; **last, s/he** _____.
3. (Author's last name) **appears to write in hopes of** (author's purpose in writing) **in order to** (change in reader/society the author wants to achieve).
4. **Because of the author's** _____ **tone, it seems as if s/he writes for a** _____ **and** _____ **audience.**

1. **In his/her** (type of text) (title of text) (year), (author's credentials) (author's first and last name) **asserts that** (argument) **by addressing** _____, _____, **and** _____.
2. **By supplying the reader with information about** _____ **and** _____, (author's last name) **builds his/her claims about** _____.
3. (Author's name) **wishes to convey to readers the importance of** (author's purpose in writing) **in order to** (change in reader/society the author wants to achieve).
4. **The author's audience likely consists of those interested in** _____ **as is evident through his/her references to** _____ **and** _____; **s/he addresses readers with a tone that is** _____ **and** _____.