

RHETORICAL PRÉCIS WORKSHEET

A rhetorical précis differs from a summary in that it is a less neutral, more analytical condensation of both the *content* and *method* of the original text. If you think of a summary as primarily a brief representation of what a text says, then you might think of the rhetorical précis as a brief representation of what a text both says and does. Although less common than a summary, a rhetorical précis is a particularly useful way to **sum up your understanding of how a text works rhetorically**.

THE STRUCTURE OF A RHETORICAL PRÉCIS

1. SENTENCE **ONE**: Name of the author, genre, and title of work, date in parentheses; a rhetorically active verb; and a THAT clause containing the major assertion or thesis in the text.
2. SENTENCE **TWO**: An explanation of *how* the author develops and supports the thesis.
3. SENTENCE **THREE**: A statement of the author's apparent *purpose*, followed by an "in order to" phrase.
4. SENTENCE **FOUR**: A description of the intended *audience* and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

RHETORICAL PRÉCIS SENTENCE STARTERS

SENTENCE ONE (WHAT?)

_____ in the _____, _____,
(AUTHOR) (A) (TITLE)
_____ that _____
(B)

SENTENCE TWO (HOW?)

_____ supports his/her _____ by _____
(AUTHOR'S LAST NAME) (B) (C)

SENTENCE THREE (WHY?)

The author's purpose is to _____
(D)
_____ in order to / so that _____

SENTENCE FOUR (TO WHOM?)

The author writes in a _____ tone for _____
(E) (AUDIENCE)

A	B	C	D	E
article, book review, essay, column, editorial	argues, argument, asserts, assertion, suggests, suggestion, claims, questions, explains, explanation	comparing, contrasting, telling, explaining, illustrating, demonstrating, defining, describing, listing	show, point out, suggest, inform, persuade, convince	formal, informal, sarcastic, humorous, contemptuous

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11 November 2013

Rhetorical Précis

In the article "End Homework Now" (2001), Etta Kralovec and John Buell claim that the practice of assigning homework is not an effective teaching method because its negative effects outweigh its benefits. Kralovec and Buell support their claims by providing examples of how homework disrupts families, overburdens children and limits learning and by dispelling myths about the benefits of homework and providing alternative practices that would lead to improvement in student achievement. The authors' purpose is to make the reader question a practice that is a trademark of the U.S. education system and decide whether it is conducive to creating a "smarter" student. They seem to be speaking to the entire educational community: administrators, teachers, students and parents.

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Rhetorical Précis

In "The Ugly Truth about Beauty" (1998), Dave Barry argues that "... women generally do not think of their looks in the same way that men do" (4). Barry illuminates this discrepancy by juxtaposing men's perceptions of their looks ("average-looking") with women's ("not good enough"), by contrasting female role models (Barbie, Cindy Crawford) with male role models (He-Man, Buzz- Off), and by comparing men's interests (the Super Bowl, lawn care) with women's (manicures). He exaggerates and stereotypes these differences in order to prevent women from so eagerly accepting society's expectation of them; in fact, Barry claims that men who want women to "look like Cindy Crawford" are "idiots" (10). Barry ostensibly addresses men in this essay because he opens and closes the essay directly addressing men (as in "If you're a man...") and offering to give them advice in a mockingly conspiratorial fashion; however, by using humor to poke fun at both men and women's perceptions of themselves, Barry makes his essay palatable to both genders and hopes to convince women to stop obsessively "thinking they need to look like Barbie" (8).

RHETORICAL PRÉCIS WRITING

A rhetorical précis analyzes both the content (the what) and the delivery (the how) of a unit of spoken or written discourse. It is a highly structured four-sentence paragraph blending summary and analysis. Each of the four sentences requires specific information; students are expected to use brief quotations (to convey a sense of the author's style and tone) and to include a terminal bibliographic reference. Practicing this sort of writing fosters precision in both reading and writing, forcing a writer to employ a variety of sentence structures and to develop a discerning eye for connotative shades of meaning.

Take a look at the overall format

1. Name of author, [optional: a phrase describing author], genre and title of work date in parentheses (additional publishing information in parentheses or note); a rhetorically accurate verb (such as "assert," "argue," "suggest," "imply," "claim," etc.); and a THAT clause containing the major assertion (thesis statement) of the work.
2. An explanation of how the author develops and/or supports the thesis, usually in chronological order.
3. A statement of the author's apparent purpose followed by an "in order to" phrase.
4. A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

Now take a closer look:

1. THE FIRST SENTENCE identifies the essay's author and title, provides the article's date in parenthesis, uses some form of the verb says (claims, asserts, suggests, argues—) followed by that, and the essay's thesis (paraphrased or quoted).

EXAMPLE: In "The Ugly Truth about Beauty" (1998), Dave Barry argues that "...women generally do not think of their looks in the same way that men do" (4).

EXAMPLE: In "The Ugly Truth about Beauty" (1998), Dave Barry satirizes the unnecessary ways that women obsess about their physical appearance.

2. THE SECOND SENTENCE conveys the author's support for the thesis (how the author develops the essay); the trick is to convey a good sense of the breadth of the author's support/examples, usually in chronological order.

EXAMPLE: Barry illuminates this discrepancy by juxtaposing men's perceptions of their looks ("average-looking") with women's ("not good enough"), by contrasting female role models (Barbie, Cindy Crawford) with male role models (He-Man, Buzz- Off), and by comparing men's interests (the Super Bowl, lawn care) with women's (manicures).

3. THE THIRD SENTENCE analyzes the author's purpose using an in order to statement:

EXAMPLE: He exaggerates and stereotypes these differences in order to prevent women from so eagerly accepting society's expectation of them; to this end, Barry claims that men who want women to "look like Cindy Crawford" are "idiots"(10), implying that women who adhere to the Crawford standard are fools as well.

4. THE FOURTH SENTENCE describes the essay's target audience and characterizes the author's relationship with that audience—or the essay's tone:

EXAMPLE: Barry ostensibly addresses men in this essay because he opens and closes the essay directly addressing men (as in "If you're a man...") and offering to give them advice in a mockingly conspiratorial fashion; however, by using humor to poke fun at both men and women's perceptions of themselves, Barry makes his essay palatable to women as well, hoping to convince them to stop obsessively "thinking they need to look like Barbie" (8).

Verb Bank

Here is a list of verbs you might find helpful. It is by no means a required or exhaustive list. Remember that you must always strive to employ the most connotatively precise words you can.

adjures advances advises asks asserts begs beseeches cajoles cheers chimes commands complains confides conveys counsels crows declares decrees decries demands describes dictates directs discloses divulges elucidates employs encourages entreats espouses exclaims exhorts explains gripes groans grouses grumbles hails hints illustrates implies implores inquires insinuates instructs intimates invokes justifies laments mandates mocks muses orders pleads ponders pontificates proclaims pronounces proposes queries rationalizes recommends recounts relates reports requests reveals sighs sings snarls sneers states submits suggests summons wails whimpers whines wields wonders

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