

The Rhetorical Précis

Overview: To concisely describe an author's argument and context in a text, academic writers sometimes use a *rhetorical précis*. This form is a **highly structured four-sentence paragraph** highlighting any text's essential rhetorical elements. 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 the author, • a phrase describing the author (optional), • 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,” etc.) that describes what the author is doing in the text, • a THAT clause in which you state the author's text's major assertion (thesis statement/claim). 	<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 how the author develops and/or supports the thesis (for instance, <i>comparing, contrasting, defining, narrating, illustrating, 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 as the support items in the work.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>Morrison supports her implication by describing how Ernest Hemingway writes about black characters and illustrating his plot development strategies in his novels and short stories.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 3: A statement of the author’s apparent purpose, followed by a phrase in which you explain what the author wants the audience to do or feel because 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 <u>to</u> help them examine the far-reaching effects racism has on those discriminated against and those who determine.</p>
<p>SENTENCE 4: A description of the intended audience and the author's relationship with the audience.</p>	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>She establishes a formal, highly analytical tone for her audience of racially mixed, theoretically sophisticated readers and critical interpreters of American literature.</p>

Templates for the Rhetorical Précis

Below are three templates you can use to write a rhetorical précis. It would help if you used these for guidance but use your best judgment about forming sentences appropriate to the text and/or author you write about.

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). **The author's purpose is to** (author's purpose in writing) **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) **to** (change in reader/society the author wants to achieve).
4. **Because of the author's** _____ **tone, it seems s/he writes for a** _____ **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) **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** _____.

Student Model Paragraphs: Samples of the Rhetorical Précis

[1] In his editorial column "A Change of Heart about Animals," published on September 1, 2003, writer and economist Jeremy Rifkin discusses animal rights and behavior. [2] He argues that animals deserve more respect due to their similarities to humans. [3] Rifkin supports his claim by highlighting the shared emotions between animals and humans, presenting evidence of human-like behaviors in animals, questioning prevailing perceptions, and urging readers to expand their empathy toward animals. [4] Rifkin's purpose persuades his audience to reconsider their views on animals and to treat them with greater compassion. [5] Rifkin employs a persuasive, emotional, and unbiased perspective, targeting readers of the *Los Angeles Times* and those interested in the similarities between human and animal behavior.

[1] Earl Shorris, Founder and Chairman of the Advisory Board for The Clemente Course in the Humanities, in his article, "On the Uses of Liberal Education: As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor" (1997), claims that through the teaching of the humanities, the poor will be able to free themselves from the forces society has on them. [2] To support his argument, Shorris does the following: first, in a narrative form, he briefly introduces his background and provides information about the current study; second, he describes his research and explains how he met a woman in a correctional facility that influenced his idea for the research study; third, he explicates his plan/methodology and the participants that form part of the study; and last, he explains the happenings and outcome of his study. [3] To help the poor reach their fullest potential through social policies and exposure to the humanities, the author seeks to convey to readers that the humanities are an essential part of life. [4] Shorris establishes an educated and inspiring article for educators and economically disadvantaged people.

[1] Scholars in the field of behavior science, L. Rowell Huesmann and Jessica Moise, in their essay “Media Violence: A Demonstrated Public Health Threat to Children” (June 1996), argue that exposure to media violence stimulates aggression in children and that children should be protected from media violence. [2] The authors support their claim by making an analogy to the issue of lung cancer and cigarettes, refuting claims made by Dr. Freedman, providing research results that show a connection between media violence and behavior, and describing the process of desensitization. [3] Their purpose is to make their readers aware that there is a connection between media violence and violence in children, to protect all children from future violence. [4] The authors use a serious, academic tone to establish a reasoned, objective attitude toward their audience of academics and researchers, especially those concerned with behavioral science and government regulations.