Riverside Community College
Writing and Reading Center
Direct Learning Activity C.15

Name: ____________________________________
Date: ________________________________

**Rhetorical Précis**

**Purpose:** Upon completion of this activity students will first **consider** the précis through the precise description of each sentences’ content, then **comprehend** the précis through the included example, and lastly students will **construct** a précis of their own. If at any time you have questions, please visit with an instructor. This DLA is adapted from the Southwestern College English 115 Curriculum Resource Manual.

**Step 1- Consider the Précis**

One useful tool you may wish to try in ENG 1A is the rhetorical précis. A précis is useful for teaching reading strategies as well as writing strategies and helps to ensure that students are engaged with the texts you assign.

**Q: What is a Rhetorical Précis?**
A: A précis is a highly structured four sentence paragraph that records the essential elements of an essay, including the name of the speaker/writer, the context of the delivery, the major assertion, the mode of development and/or support, the stated and/or apparent purpose, and the relationship established between the speaker/writer and the audience. Each of the four sentences requires specific information. Students are also encouraged to use brief quotations to convey a sense of style and tone.

**Q: How do I write a Rhetorical Précis?**
A: Each sentence of the paragraph should contain the following information:

**First sentence:** 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. Think of it this way: WHO are you talking about? WHAT is their background? WHAT did they write? WHAT year was it written? WHAT is their point?

**Second sentence:** An explanation of the evidence and development the author uses to develop and/or support the thesis, usually in chronological order. Think of it this way: HOW do they prove their thesis? Do they offer interviews? Official data? Other outside sources? Anecdotes?

**Third sentence:** A statement of the author’s apparent purpose followed by an "in order" phrase. Think of it this way: Are they trying to entertain you? Persuade you to feel a certain way or change your mind about an issue? Are they trying to inform you – sharing information that teaches - ? WHY is that their purpose? In order to accomplish what?

**Fourth sentence:** A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience. Think of it this way: WHO is the author trying to address? For example, are they talking to teachers? parents? senior citizens? Latinos? Muslims? registered voters? It can be anyone. You need to determine if they are addressed formally (use of academic language, proper English) or informally (more conversational tone, use of slang, etc...).

**Q: Does the précis need to be MLA formatted?**
A: Yes, your précis and reading response should be formatted according to MLA rules, including creating a Works Cited page.
Step 2- Comprehend the Précis

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.

Here’s a sample Rhetorical Précis:

Natalia Leyva
Professor Beach
Eng 1A
16 July 2012

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.

If you have any questions regarding the description of the précis or this sample please visit with an instructor; otherwise, students should proceed to step 3.

Step 3- Construct a Précis
Complete the following worksheet based on the attached essay. You need not print the essay unless you want to. When you are finished review your answers with an instructor and have them sign and date this sheet please.
Riverside Community College  Name: ____________________________
Writing and Reading Center  Date: ____________________________
Direct Learning Activity C.15

**Rhetorical Précis Sentence Starters**

*Sentence One (Who/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)                             (D)

____________________________ in order to / so that ______________________


*Sentence Four (To Whom?)*

The author writes in a ______________________ tone for ______________________

(E)                             (E)                             (audience)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Argues/argument</td>
<td>Comparing/contrasting</td>
<td>Show</td>
<td>Formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book review</td>
<td>Asserts/assertion</td>
<td>Telling/ Explaining</td>
<td>Point out</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>Suggests/suggestion</td>
<td>Defining</td>
<td>Suggest</td>
<td>Sarcastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column</td>
<td>Claims</td>
<td>Illustrating</td>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>Humorous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Demonstrating</td>
<td>Persuade</td>
<td>Contemptuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains/explanation</td>
<td>Describing</td>
<td>Convince</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Listing |