Rhetorical Précis

This Rhetorical Précis DLA consists of three steps. Students are to first consider the précis through the precise description of each sentences’ content, then comprehend the précis through an the included example, and lastly students will construct a précis of their own. If at any times you have any 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:

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Professor Beach

Eng 1A

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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. When you are finished review your answers with an instructor and have them sign and date this sheet please.

Rhetorical Précis Sentence Starters

Sentence One (Who/What?)

______________________________ in the _______________________, _______________________

(Author) (A) (Title)

______________________________

(B)

Sentence Two (How?)

______________________________ supports his/her _______________________

(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)

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<td>article, book review, essay, column, editorial</td>
<td>argues, argument, asserts, assertion, suggests, suggestion, claims, questions, explains, explanation</td>
<td>comparing, contrasting, telling, explaining, illustrating, demonstrating, defining, describing, listing</td>
<td>show, point out, suggest, inform, persuade</td>
<td>formal, informal, sarcastic, humorous, contemptuous</td>
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So What's So Bad about Being So-So?

Lisa Wilson Strick


1 The other afternoon I was playing the piano when my seven-year-old walked in. He stopped and listened awhile, then said: "Gee, Mom, you don't play that thing very well, do you?"

2 No, I don't. I am a piano lesson dropout. The fine points of fingering totally escape me. I play everything at half-speed, with many errant notes. My performance would make any serious music student wince, but I don't care. I've enjoyed playing the piano badly for years.

3 I also enjoy singing badly and drawing badly. (I used to enjoy sewing badly, but I've been doing that so long that I finally got pretty good at it.) I'm not ashamed of my incompetence in these areas. I do one or two other things well and that should be enough for anybody. But it gets boring doing the same things over and over. Every now and then it's fun to try something new.

4 Unfortunately, doing things badly has gone out of style. It used to be a mark of class if a lady or a gentleman sang a little, painted a little, played the violin a little. You didn't have to be good at it; the point was to be fortunate enough to have the leisure time for such pursuits. But in today's competitive world we have to be "experts"—even in our hobbies. You can't tone up your body by pulling on your sneakers and slogging around the block a couple of times anymore. Why? Because you'll be laughed off the street by the "serious" runners—the ones who log twenty-plus miles a week in their headbands, sixty-dollar running suits and fancy shoes. The shoes are really a big deal. If you say you're thinking about taking up almost any sport, the first thing the aficionados will ask is what you plan to do about shoes. Leather or canvas? What type of soles? Which brand? This is not the time to mention that the gym shoes you wore in high school are still in pretty good shape. As far as sports enthusiasts are concerned, if you don't have the latest shoes you are hopelessly committed to mediocrity.

5 The runners aren't nearly so snobbish as the dance freaks, however. In case you didn't know, "going dancing" no longer means putting on a pretty dress and doing a few turns around the ballroom with your favorite man on Saturday night. "Dancing" means squeezing into tights and a leotard and leg warmers, then sweating through six hours of warm-ups and five hours of ballet and four hours of jazz classes. Every week. Never tell anyone that you "like to dance" unless this is the sort of activity you enjoy. (At least the costume isn't so costly, as dancers seem to be cultivating a riches-to-rags look lately.)

6 We used to do these things for fun or simply to relax. Now the competition you face in your hobbies is likely to be worse than anything you run into on the job. "Oh, you've taken up knitting," a friend recently said to me. "Let me show you the adorable cable-knit, popcorn-stitched cardigan with twelve tiny reindeer prancing across the yoke that I made for my daughter. I dyed the yarn myself." Now why did she have to go and do that? I was getting a kick out of watching my yellow stockinette muffer grow a couple of inches a week up till then. And all I wanted was something to keep my hands busy while I watched television anyway.

7 Have you noticed what this is doing to our children? "We don't want that dodo on our soccer team," I overheard a ten-year-old sneer the other day. "He doesn't know a goal kick from a head shot." As it happens, the boy was talking about my son, who did not—like some of his friends—start soccer instruction at age three (along with preschool diving, creative writing and Suzuki clarinet). I'm sorry, Son, I guess I blew it. In my day when we played softball on the corner lot, we expected to give a little instruction to the younger kids who didn't know how. It didn't matter if they were terrible; we weren't out to slaughter the other team. Sometimes we didn't even keep score. To
us, sports were just a way of having a good time. Of course we didn’t have some of the
nifty things kids have today—such as matching uniforms and professional coaches. All
we had was a bunch of kids of various ages who enjoyed each other’s company.

I don’t think kids have as much fun as they used to. Competition keeps getting in
the way. The daughter of a neighbor is a nervous wreck worrying about getting into
the best gymnastics school. “I was a late starter,” she told me, “and I only get to prac-
tice five or six hours a week, so my technique may not be up to their standards.” The
child is nine. She doesn’t want to be a gymnast when she grows up; she wants to be a
nurse. I asked what she likes to do for fun in her free time. She seemed to think it was
an odd question. “Well, I don’t actually have a lot of free time,” she said. “I mean
homework and gymnastics and flute lessons kind of eat it all up. I have flute lessons
three times a week now, so I have a good shot at getting into the all-state orchestra.”

Ambition, drive and the desire to excel are all admirable within limits, but I don’t know
where the limits are anymore. I know a woman who has always wanted to learn a foreign
language. For years she has complained that she hasn’t the time to study one. I’ve pointed
out that an evening course in French or Italian would take only a couple of hours a week,
but she keeps putting it off. I suspect that what she hasn’t got the time for is to become
completely fluent within the year—and that any lesser level of accomplishment would
embarrass her. Instead she spends her evenings watching reruns on television and tidying
up her closets—occupations at which no particular expertise is expected.

I know others who are avoiding activities they might enjoy because they lack the
time or the energy to tackle them “seriously.” It strikes me as so silly. We are talking
about recreation. I have nothing against self-improvement. But when I hear a teenager
muttering “practice makes perfect” as he grimly makes his four-hundred-and-twenty-
seventh try at hooking the basketball into the net left-handed, I wonder if some of us
aren’t improving ourselves right into the loony bin.

I think it’s time we put a stop to all this. For sanity’s sake, each of us should vow to
take up something new this week—and to make sure we never master it completely.
Sing along with grand opera. Make peculiar-looking objects out of clay. I can tell you
from experience that fallen soufflés still taste pretty good. The point is to enjoy being
a beginner again; to rediscover the joy of creative fooling around. If you find it diffi-
cult, ask any two-year-old to teach you. Two-year-olds have a gift for tackling the
impossible with zest; repeated failure hardly discourages them at all.

As for me, I’m getting a little out of shape so I’m looking into tennis. A lot of people
I know enjoy it, and it doesn’t look too hard. Given a couple of lessons I should
be stumbling gracelessly around the court and playing badly in no time at all.