

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-