**Rhetorical Précis**

One useful tool you may wish to try is the rhetorical précis. A précis helps to ensure that you will be engaged with the texts. You might begin incorporating this into your journal entries for your readings.

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 (*Reading Rhetorically*, 62)

**Q**: What is a Rhetorical Précis?

**A**: A précis is a four sentence paragraph that records the essential elements of an essay. Each of the four sentences requires specific information.

**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; 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 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…).*

**RHETORICAL PRECIS TEMPLATE**

SENTENCE ONE (What):

In his/her \_\_(A)\_\_\_ (type of work), \_\_\_\_\_ (title of work), \_\_\_\_\_\_ (name of author) \_\_(B)\_\_\_(a rhetorically accurate verb) that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (the author’s assertion, argument, position, etc.).

SENTENCE TWO (How):

\_\_\_\_\_ (the author) develops/supports this \_\_\_\_\_ (change rhetorical verb to noun)  by \_\_\_\_\_\_(C)\_\_\_\_\_\_(reveal author’s technique).

SENTENCE THREE (Why):

\_\_\_\_\_’s (author) purpose is to \_\_(D)\_\_\_(reveal author’s purpose) in order to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (what author wants reading audience to react to: feel and/or do).

SENTENCE FOUR (To Whom):

\_\_\_\_\_ (author) uses \_\_(E)\_\_\_ (description of tone) with his \_\_\_\_\_ (describe author’s audience).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 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 |

**RHETORICAL PRECIS SAMPLE:**

1 Oscar Wilde, in his three-act play "The Importance of Being Earnest," argues that gender relationships are based more on perceived sincerity than on honesty. 2 Wilde develops this argument through the pairing of several characters within the play, such as Jack Worthing with Gwendolen Fairfax, and the Reverend Chasuble with Miss Prism, characters who are sincere in their love for each other, but deceptive in demonstrating that love. 3 Wilde's purpose is to reveal inconsistencies between these characters' feelings of love and their actions toward one another, in order to offend the reader with the hypocrisies of conventional Victorian views about courting and marriage. 4 Wilde employs a witty, humorously satirical tone with his younger, emerging middle-class post-Victorian audience.