



Writing a Précis

In order to describe quickly and effectively the argument and context an author presents in a text, use a format called the rhetorical précis. This form is a **highly structured four-sentence paragraph** that records the essential rhetorical elements in any spoken or written discourse. The following is a breakdown of the information you should include in each one of the four sentences. **Follow the formula!**

Sentence 1:

Name of author, [optional: a phrase describing the author], the type and title of the work, a rhetorically accurate, **active verb** (such as "assert," "argue," "suggest," "imply," "claim," etc.) that describes what the author is doing in the text, followed by a **THAT clause** in which you state the major assertion (thesis statement) of the author's text.

Sentence 2:

An explanation of **how** the author develops and/or supports the thesis (for instance, comparing and contrasting, narrating, illustrating, defining, using humor or sarcasm, relating personal experience, using examples, etc.). Your explanation is usually presented in the same chronological order that the items of support are presented in the work.

Sentence 3:

A statement of the author's apparent purpose, followed by an **IN ORDER TO** phrase in which you explain what the author wants the audience to do or feel as a result of reading the work.

Sentence 4:

A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

Example:

1. Toni Morrison, 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.
2. Morrison **supports her implication by** describing how Ernest Hemingway writes about black characters in his novels and short stories.
3. **Her purpose is to** make her readers aware of the cruel reality of racism underlying some of the greatest works of American literature **IN ORDER TO** help them examine the far-reaching effects racism has not only on those discriminated against but also on those who discriminate.
4. She establishes a **formal and highly analytical tone** with her audience of **racially mixed** (but probably mainly white), **theoretically sophisticated** readers and critical interpreters of American literature.