

How to Write a Précis

Many students are unfamiliar with what a précis actually is. However, it does serve a purpose in academic writing, research studies, and scientific reports. A "précis" is a french word that means "precise" or "to the point." It is used by professors to gauge a student's writing skills as well as their ability to create a concise summary. It also shows whether they can stay focused on the main points. For effective précis writing, a student must be able to express their thoughts clearly and only write about the most essential information.

Now we will cover the best practices for creating a proper précis.

What is a Précis?

A précis is a short synopsis of another written piece, usually a book or a scholarly article. Its main purpose is to summarize the main ideas of the piece without making it a critical analysis. You should try to keep your personal opinion out of this type of writing since that is not its main function. At the same time, a reader should be able to know certain ideas from the piece after reading the précis alone.

When you write a précis, your job is to summarize the **author's argument** rather than write a article summary of the piece itself.

Precision is crucial when writing. There should be a logical sequence when conveying your points and each sentence should flow into the next one. Be careful not to include any irrelevant details or information from other sources. Précis writing should always be done in the third person so that it is easier to objectively explain your point.

Summary vs. Précis

While a précis might sound like a summary, the two of them are different from each other. A summary's function is to explain the main points of a particular text. It also usually gives a very general description of the work.

A précis is not the same. You should not merely generalize the article in your own words. Instead, you will be writing about a particular part of the narrative work, like a chapter of a book or a scene of a play. You will then focus on all of the specific details of that segment.

Rhetorical Précis Parts

A rhetorical précis might be more difficult to write. Their structure is usually shorter and is only a paragraph. You must explain the main ideas of the piece while also providing a brief analysis of how the author fleshed out his/her arguments. All this should be done in four sentences.

A rhetorical précis should include:

- Bibliographical information including the author's name, the title of the piece, and the date it was written
- A statement explaining the author's method
- Details about how the author wrote and developed their main argument. How did they capture the reader's attention?

It is important to note that a rhetorical précis is different from a [rhetorical analysis](#).

Key Elements of a Précis

Now you are ready to write. Before you begin, keep in mind that the sentences need to be short and concise, so you should avoid writing unnecessary words. Word count is not as important as making sure the core information is being presented.

Keep these guidelines in mind:

- You will need a title that properly describes the content
- A précis is usually written in third person
- All sentences should connect to each other and explain the author's intention in a clear, logical way
- A précis is usually written in the present tense. However, if you are explaining something that happened in the past, like a historical event, you should use the past tense.
- It should be 1/3 or 1/4 of the original text that you are analyzing
- Your argument should be objective and logical
- There should be no grammar or spelling mistakes

6 Steps for Précis Writing

1. **Read the original text.** Either your teacher will give you the assignment to read or you will have to choose it yourself. If you are given a choice on what to write about, make sure that it is interesting to you. You will be doing a complete analysis of the work for your précis. Your research will be much easier if you write about something that is compelling to you rather than something that isn't. While reading the essay, be sure to take lots of notes. Write down quotes from the piece that stand out to you and might help you defend your analysis.
2. **Start brainstorming ideas.** To some, this is the most fun part of writing. When you brainstorm, you can throw all of the rules of précis writing out of the window and just get creative. With your mind being free to think, this is where some of your best ideas are born. If you feel bold enough you could [write a short essay](#) using all the notes and research you've collected. Do whatever you need to do to jumpstart your mind. You can scribble down words on a piece of paper or create a mind map drawing. Reflect on what point you would like to

make. The best part is that even if you come up with some ideas that don't quite fit into your précis, you can just erase them and nobody will ever know.

3. **Make an outline.** Here is when you combine the research (quotes and facts) from the assignment and the ideas that you came up with while brainstorming. Be sure to structure your outline clearly so that you know exactly what points you want to convey to the reader.
4. **Re read the original text.** It is necessary to go through the piece one more time for any important information that you might have missed. This info can then be used for your supporting arguments. It is also important to make sure all of the points you already have are correct and that there are no mistakes in your evidence. (If you need help deciphering a piece of text, we can [write a literature review for you.](#))
5. **Write a précis.** If your teacher gave you an assignment with guidelines to follow, make sure you address them while you're writing. Be sure to tackle all of the key points from your outline as well. And of course, make sure it is objective. Did you make sure to keep your personal opinions out of it? Did you come to your conclusion based on facts and evidence found in the main events of the essay? (*Check out the format for a good précis below.*)
6. **Proofread and edit.** Once all of this is done, it is time to proofread your précis. Proofreading means going through your text and looking for grammar and spelling errors to make sure there are no mistakes. Many people use grammar and spell checkers. You might also consider giving your work to someone else to check. It never hurts having another pair of eyes look at what you wrote.
One thing to remember when editing your précis is sentence length. If you feel like a sentence is too long, there is nothing wrong with using a shorter sentence. A shorter paragraph is also better than a longer one.

Précis Format

The précis has important details in terms of format that you need to remember. This is actually a good thing for you. Since there is only a limited structure, it means you don't have a lot of leeway to go and make your own thing. You have to follow the rules and once you do, you will have your précis!

Most of the time, you can use the standard essay format of introduction, body, and conclusion. The format will usually be determined by the length of the main work. A précis for a short story will be different from that of a novel.

Before we get into the specifics of the format, **be sure to check with your professor.** He/she might have already given you a format to follow.

Below is the normal format for a four-sentence précis.

1. **Introductory sentence.** In the first sentence, you should write the name of the author and the title of the article/book. You can also include a rhetorical verb that clearly outlines the author's purpose (such as "argue", "prove", or "disprove").
2. **Body sentences.** Here you will make a summary of how the author's thesis was formulated and how he makes his important points clear to the reader. For example, how does he support the claim that he is making? You can use the "in order" phrase here to help you develop the sentence.
If you are writing a précis with only four sentences, the third sentence should mention the audience. For example, you can ask yourself questions like, what techniques does the author use to gain the reader's attention? How does he establish a connection with them?
3. **Conclusion.** Finally, you should make a restatement of the author's main point. You can also give some brief, final comments on how the author develops his argument.
Of course, if the text is several pages then your précis will be longer than four sentences. You can follow the typical essay structure (introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion). If you need help getting started you can [make an essay order](#) on our website.

Do's and Dont's of Précis Writing

Do's

- Keep the structure concise while only focusing on facts and evidence
- A good précis requires the author's background information like their name, the title of the work, and the date
- Make sure all of the words and sentences connect with each other and that your point is clear and easy to follow
- Remember you are writing a short representation of the original text. The reader should have a good idea about what the article is about based on your précis

Dont's

- Make sure to keep your own opinion and criticism out of the work
- You should not write any questions
- It should not be longer than the original passage
- A précis is not a general summary of what you researched
- Do not give assumptions. Everything in the précis should be based on facts and details from the text. Avoid giving your own interpretation
- You should not spend too long focusing on one point
- Do not copy and paste sentences from the article into your work

Précis Writing Example

Here is an example of a standard four-sentence précis utilizing all of the rules we have mentioned thus far:

In Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech (1963), he makes the case that all Americans should be given equal rights regardless of their skin color and/or heritage. He establishes his case by using powerful anecdotes and metaphors that clearly portray the inequality in the United States at the time. He also repeats the signature "I have a dream" as a goal that everyone needs to strive for and aimed to convince his audience that the rules enforcing segregation were wrong and led to conflict in society. King's tone is both earnest and sincere as he addresses normal Americans as well as the government.

FAQ

How long should a précis be?

The length will vary depending on the length of the original work. For a short article, the typical rule is 100-200 words. If you were writing a précis for a book, however, it could be several pages. Generally, you can expect it to be 1/3 or 1/4 the length of the original text.

What kind of writing is précis writing?

A précis is considered a concise summary of a longer work. The sentences should be well-connected and easy to read. Some think of it as a type of [article summary](#) (if the main text is an actual article). But no matter what type of writing it represents, it should be succinct, clear, and coherent. A rhetorical précis is usually a four-sentence paragraph.

Which of the following points should be avoided while writing a précis?

- Do not use abbreviations
- You should avoid long sentences or jargon that makes your précis difficult to read
- Stay away from facts and details that have nothing to do with your main point

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