Four-Sentence Rhetorical Précis

The four-sentence rhetorical précis is a highly structured paragraph that records the essential elements of a unit of spoken or written discourse. Each of the four sentences requires specific information (see below). The précis might also include brief quotations (typically a few words or a phrase) to convey an author's sense of style, tone, and/or unique voice. Two useful websites offer additional explanations and examples:

www.winthrop.edu/english/core/success/precis.htm

oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/rhetorical-precis/sample/peirce_sample_precis_click.html

Sentence #1

- Name of the author and, if possible, a phrase describing the credentials of the author
- The genre (essay, lecture, research paper, etc.) and title of the work
- The date, if available (inserted in parentheses)
- A rhetorically accurate present tense verb (asserts, argues, suggests, implies, claims, etc.) that describes what the author is doing in the text
- A THAT clause which states the major assertion (thesis statement) of the author's text

Sentence #2

- An explanation of how the author develops and/or supports the thesis (such as by comparing and contrasting, narrating, illustrating, defining, etc.)
- Present explanation in the same chronological order that the items of support are presented by the author in the text
- Use present tense verbs

Sentence #3

- A statement of the author's purpose
- Followed by an IN ORDER TO clause which explains what the author wants the audience to do or feel as a result of reading the work
- Use present tense verbs

Sentence #4

- A description of the tone the author uses
- A description of the intended audience
- Use present tense verbs

Four-Sentence Rhetorical Précis Frame

1. _____, _____   _____, in his/her
     (author's credentials—optional)   *(author's first and last name)*

_____ , _____ (_____) , argues (or
 (genre)   *(title of text; date in parentheses)*

some other appropriate verb) that _____
                                              (major assertion of author's text)

_____

_____ .

2. She/he supports her/his claim by first _____

_____ , then _____

_____

_____ , then _____

_____ , and finally_____

_____.

3. _____ 's purpose is to _____
     (author's last name)   *(purpose)*

_____ in order to

_____ .
               (to accomplish what?)

4. She/he _____ a(n) _____ tone for
       (verb: adopts, establishes, creates, etc.)   *(tone)*

_____ .
                    (intended audience).

Four-Sentence Rhetorical Précis - *A Sample*

Statesman and philosopher, Thomas Jefferson, in *The Declaration of Independence* (1776), argues that the God-given rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness entitle the colonists to freedom from the oppressive British government and guarantee them the right to declare independence. He supports his claim by first invoking the fact of our inalienable rights, then he establishes the circumstances under which a people can throw off an oppressive government; he next proceeds to show that these circumstances have been created by King George III whose oppressive rule now forces the colonists to the separation. The purpose of this document is to convince all readers of the necessity to officially declare independence from Great Britain in order to establish a separate independent nation, the United States of America. Jefferson establishes a passionate and challenging tone for a worldwide audience, but particularly the British and King George III.

"I taught English as a first year teacher last year and even with AVID in its initial year (at our school), I could distinguish between the 'regular' and AVID students quite easily by their behavior and commitment to success."

—Maggie Hallam,
Adams City High School, Denver, CO