

## TWC 521/421

### How to write a rhetorical *précis*

The word *précis* is French for "precise" or "exact." A rhetorical *précis* is a highly structured summary designed to explain the rhetorical structure and purpose of an argument. The short version of a *précis* has five elements:

[1] Bibliographic citation (either MLA or APA style)

[2] A sentence with a rhetorically active verb that both puts the article in some context -- the type of journal or book in which it appears -- and describes *what the writer is doing with the text* ("suggests that," "argues that," "implies that," "urges that," "claims that," etc.)

[3] An explanation of *how* the writer develops, structures, and supports the argument. This is usually done by comparing and contrasting, illustrating, defining, or putting the article into context

[4] An explanation of the writer's purpose, followed by an "in order to" clause, which *explains the intended effect on the audience*

[5] A description of the intended audience

**Note that the *précis* form is not evaluative, but analytic (i.e., your readers don't care if you liked it or not – they want your analysis of the text)**

Here's my sample *précis* – you don't need to add [bracketed numbers] in yours, I do it here so you can see the "map" of my *précis*:

[1] Kitwana, Bakari. "Walking the Tightrope: The Art, Reality, and Impact of Tupac Shakur." Tough Love: The Life and Death of Tupac Shakur: 31-33.

[2] In this essay, part of a collection designed to reflect on and celebrate Tupac Shakur's life and career, Kitwana argues that Shakur and his music are misunderstood by many of his fans and critics. [3] Kitwana reviews some of Shakur's musical releases, showing how they were both a part of, and a response to, changes in the rap-music industry in the 1980's and 1990's. [4] Because Shakur was a controversial artist, Kitwana puts rap music in its cultural and economic contexts in order to make distinctions between entertainment and the realities of black culture. [5] Tough Love contains critical commentary, poetry, and personal responses to Shakur's life and career, and is aimed toward an academic audience of music and cultural critics.

**Reflection on my *précis*** these are very difficult to write. In the article I chose, on Tupac Shakur, the writer was making a very subtle and complex argument, which is hard to summarize in one sentence or so. For example, the section on describing the writer's purpose [4], I could've written many different ways. I could've chosen to emphasize his argument that we can't understand Shakur's music unless we understand the inequities and injustices that many cultures experience in a global economy. Or I could've written that Kitwana was being critical of the rap-music industry, in which he participates as the political editor of The Source: The Magazine of Hip-Hop Music, Culture, and Politics and the author of The Rap on Gangsta Rap: Who Run It? Gangsta Rap and Visions of Black Violence.