

What is a précis? The definition.

Précis, from the Old French and literally meaning “cut short” (dictionary.com), is a concise summary of a text. The précis, then, explains the main point, logical support, and structure of the original work but in greatly condensed form.

The précis is objective, unlike a critical analysis, which evaluates the argument and use of evidence within an article. Thus, the précis does not offer evaluations about a text, nor does it include personal reaction to a text.

How should a writer begin to write a précis? The note-taking process.

- Read and annotate the text.
- Reflect on the author's purpose.
- Consider the kinds of evidence the author uses.
- Restate the author's thesis – main argument – in your own words.
 - Why did the author write the book?
- Write a one or two sentence summary of each section (chapter) of the text.
- Reread the text to compare it with your summary notes.
- Begin writing, using your paraphrase of the thesis and your one or two sentence summary statements. Follow the structure outlined below.
- Review your précis to confirm that you have explained the main point of the text, identified the supporting evidence that the writer uses, and have used the same logical structure as the text.
- Finally, check for clarity, coherence, and correctness.

Final structure of the précis: Three paragraphs.

- First paragraph – here you include the basic information from the book
 - When and where does the story take place?
 - Who are the main characters?
 - What is the main activity described?
- Second paragraph – how does the author present his thesis and evidence
 - What details are used to advance the thesis or argument?
- Third paragraph – discuss the importance of the story within the context of the course
 - How does the story enhance your understanding of the period under study for the course?