

A REVIEW OF CRITICAL READING SKILLS

This handout will *review* the following: Steps to Critical Reading; What is a Summary; What is a Rhetorical Précis; and What are the Classical Rhetorical Appeals of Persuasion. Understanding and mastery of these skills will be necessary for your success in writing Papers 2 and 3. For more detailed information, you may also review our PowerPoint presentations on Blackboard, as well as chapters in your text on summary writing and critical reading in your text, and also handouts you've received in class.

STEPS TO CRITICAL READING

1. Consider what the **title** tells you about the essay.
2. Try to learn something about the **author**.
3. Determine the **purpose** of the essay (persuasion, exposition, personal expression).
4. Determine the intended **audience**.
5. Locate the **thesis statement/main idea**. The thesis statement expresses the main idea of an essay. Sometimes it's clearly stated; sometimes it's implied. You should be able to either locate the author's thesis directly or re-state it in your own words.
6. Identify **key ideas and supporting evidence**.
7. **Summarize** the main points in outline form.
8. **Evaluate** the writer's argument, including his or her persuasive strategies (**see next page**).
9. **Write a rhetorical précis which includes both content and persuasive strategies**.
10. **Respond** to what you have read.

RHETORICAL PRÉCIS

Although less common than a summary, a rhetorical précis is a particularly useful way to sum up your understanding of how a text works rhetorically. Part summary and part analysis, the rhetorical précis is a powerful skill-building exercise often assigned as a highly-structured four-sentence paragraph. These sentences provide a condensed statement of a text's main point (the summary part), followed by brief statements about its essential rhetorical elements: the purpose, methods, and intended audience (the analysis part).

Unlike a summary, the rhetorical précis is formulaic, **having only four sentences** with very specific requirements for each sentence. The critical reading challenge here is not only displaying your comprehension of the article's content, but also the strategies used by the author to convey that purpose. The writing challenge is learning how to craft your sentences precisely to form, that are logical and coherent, and that are structurally and grammatically correct. Sentence 2 will probably be the longest and most complex because it represents the author's main supporting points in a single sentence.

See next page for how to structure a Rhetorical Précis.

HOW TO STRUCTURE A RHETORICAL PRÉCIS

Sentence 1 Name of the author, genre, and title of work, date in parentheses; a rhetorically accurate verb (such as “claims,” “argues,” “suggests”); and a THAT clause containing the major assertion or thesis statement in the work.

How to begin: In the (genre) article, “ _____,” (date), author (so and so) (rhetorically accurate verb) that _____ (thesis).

Sentence 2 An explanation of how the author develops and supports the thesis, usually in chronological order.

How to begin: (Name of author) supports his argument by....

Sentence 3 A statement of the author’s apparent purpose, followed by an “in order to” clause.

How to begin: (Name of author’s) apparent purpose is _____ in order to _____.

Sentence 4 A description of the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

How to begin: (Name of author)’s audience is (primarily/probably/mostly/etc) _____ because he _____ (explanation).

WHAT ARE THE CLASSICAL APPEALS OF PERSUASION?

Aristotle's three types of persuasion are appeals to *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Modern English has no accurate single-word synonyms for these terms, but you can get close with these paraphrases:

Ethos: Appeal to one's own reputation for or performance of honesty and wisdom (also known as "ethical persona," but not necessarily the same as "being ethical"--rhetoric is about persuasion, not philosophy).

Pathos: Appeal to the audience's emotions or sympathies.

Logos: Appeal to logic and evidence from sources other than the author's or readers' own experience.

Often the appeals are combined, such as a carefully reasoned argument (*logos*) that ends with a personal anecdote (*pathos*), or a discussion of one’s expertise on a subject (*ethos*) in order to establish one as a reputable source of the evidence which follows (*logos*).

Also, each appeal can be “undercut or can fail catastrophically” if the author underestimates the audience’s ability to judge *ethos*, overestimates or otherwise mistakes their response to *pathos*, or fails to manipulate logic and evidence properly, using logical fallacies or evidence/data that is not reliable.*

* Source: Adapted and/or borrowed from Classical Rhetorical Appeals in Rhetorical Essays
(http://faculty.goucher.edu/eng211/classical_rhetorical_strategies_in_persuasive_essays.htm)