The Rhetorical Precis: Description and Examples

Description

The rhetorical precis is a four sentence summary of an article that accurately and briefly represents the author's argument, method of development and support, purpose, and relationship to audience (which suggests tone).

The sentences are:

1. Name of author, [optional: a phrase describing the author], genre and title of work, date in parentheses; a rhetorically accurate verb (such as "assert," "argue," "suggest," "imply," "claim," etc.); and a THAT clause containing the major assertion (thesis statement) of the work.

2. An explanation of how the author develops and/or supports the thesis, usually in chronological order (nature of evidence).

3. A statement of the author's apparent purpose, followed by an "in order" phrase.

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

Adapted from Woodworth, Margaret K. "The Rhetorical Precis." *Rhetoric Review* 7.1 (Autumn, 1988): 156-164.

Example 1: Precis of an Article

Citation:

> Pope-Ruark, Rebecca. "Know Thy Audience: Helping Students Engage a Threshold Concept Using Audience-Based Pedagogy." *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 5.1 (2011): n. page. Web. Feb. 2012.

Precis:

> Rebecca Pope-Ruark, in her peer-reviewed journal article "Know Thy Audience: Helping Students Engage a Threshold Concept Using Audience-Based Pedagogy" (2011), argues that a student's understanding of "audience" seldom exists beyond the concept of evaluative instructor-audience and that feedback from a real audience or outside client in the classroom can be helpful in preparing a student to engage the multi-faceted audiences of the professional world.

> Pope-Ruark develops this idea by presenting a case study of nine professional writing and rhetoric students who worked closely with library staff in order to create a pilot set of instructional videos on library services; she discusses students' perceptions of audience before and after receiving feedback from library staff and finally examines the implications of the study on the teaching of audience-based writing.

> Her purpose is to suggest the use of client-based writing and rhetoric assignments as a potential pedagogical tool for fellow educators in order to provide students with a better and more comprehensive sense of both evaluative and collaborative rhetorical audiences.

> Pope-Ruark develops an interactive relationship with her intended academic audience by inviting both her fellow professional writing and rhetoric instructors and instructors from any academic field involving writing-based assignments into an ongoing discussion on the benefits of audience-based pedagogy.

Example 2: Precis of a Thesis

Citation:

> Wedell, Vicki. Community-based fisheries management in Port Orford, Oregon: Partnering local and scientific knowledge through a geographic information system to support long-term planning on the South Coast. MS Thesis, Oregon State University, 2003. Print.

Precis:

> Vicki Wedell, in her masters thesis "Community-based fisheries management in Port Orford, Oregon: Partnering local and scientific knowledge through a geographic information system to support long-term planning on the South Coast" (2003), demonstrates that local knowledge interviews and GIS not only provide important ecological, economic and social information relevant to fisheries management, but also offer fishing communities a process for active participation in management discussions about a local areas.

> Wedell develops this idea by interviewing 30 individuals who utilize the Port Orford marine environment for their occupation or leisure activities, mapping their knowledge using a geographic information system, presenting a community inventory of the distribution of human activities and species, and laying the groundwork for more in depth economic studies and spatial analysis.

> Her purpose is to help fishing communities and fisheries management understand the potential benefits of and barriers to mapping local knowledge in a geographic information system in order that they may make an informed choice about whether to embark on this kind of project for local and regional fisheries planning.

> Wedell establishes a scholarly relationship with academics interested in methods for mapping local experiential knowledge to support long-term planning for fisheries management; she also includes information and methods for non-specialists.