
Rhetorical Precis Examples

(Model Examples with Sentence-by-Sentence Breakdown)

How to Use This PDF

Each example below includes:

- A **full 4-sentence rhetorical precis**
- A **clear breakdown** of what each sentence does

 Remember:

- Exactly **4 sentences**
 - **Present tense**
 - **Third person**
 - **No personal opinion**
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Example 1: Argumentative Essay

Text Analyzed

Martin Luther King Jr., “*Letter from Birmingham Jail*” (1963)

Complete Rhetorical Precis

Martin Luther King Jr., in his letter “*Letter from Birmingham Jail*” (1963), argues that nonviolent direct action is a necessary and morally justified response to unjust laws. King develops this argument by distinguishing just laws from unjust laws, by citing historical and religious figures who resisted oppression, and by responding directly to criticisms from white clergymen. King’s purpose is to defend the urgency of civil disobedience in order to persuade moderates to support immediate action against racial injustice. King writes for a broad American audience, particularly white religious leaders, and adopts a firm yet respectful tone to appeal to their moral conscience.

Sentence Breakdown

- **Sentence 1:** Author, text, year, main argument

- **Sentence 2:** How the argument is developed
 - **Sentence 3:** Purpose and intended effect
 - **Sentence 4:** Audience and tone
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Example 2: Informative / Analytical Article

Text Analyzed

Malcolm Gladwell, “*Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted*” (2010)

Complete Rhetorical Precis

Malcolm Gladwell, in his article “*Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted*” (2010), argues that social media activism lacks the discipline and commitment required for meaningful social change. Gladwell supports this claim by comparing modern online activism with the civil rights movement, by using historical case studies, and by analyzing the limitations of weak social ties. Gladwell’s purpose is to challenge the belief that digital platforms alone can drive serious political movements in order to encourage deeper forms of engagement. Gladwell writes for readers interested in social media and activism and uses a critical, analytical tone to question popular assumptions.

Sentence Breakdown

- **Sentence 1:** Main claim about social media activism
 - **Sentence 2:** Comparison + historical evidence
 - **Sentence 3:** Purpose beyond informing
 - **Sentence 4:** Audience and tone
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Example 3: Scientific / Explanatory Article

Text Analyzed

Rachel Carson, “*Silent Spring*” (1962)

Complete Rhetorical Precis

Rachel Carson, in her book *“Silent Spring”* (1962), asserts that the widespread use of chemical pesticides causes severe and lasting damage to the environment. Carson develops this argument by presenting scientific research, by documenting ecological case studies, and by explaining the long-term consequences of chemical exposure. Carson’s purpose is to inform the public about environmental dangers in order to promote regulatory change and environmental responsibility. Carson addresses general readers and policymakers and adopts an authoritative yet accessible tone to make complex scientific information understandable.

Sentence Breakdown

- **Sentence 1:** Environmental argument
 - **Sentence 2:** Scientific development methods
 - **Sentence 3:** Inform + motivate action
 - **Sentence 4:** Audience and tone
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Example 4: Contemporary Opinion Essay

Text Analyzed

Nicholas Carr, *“Is Google Making Us Stupid?”* (2008)

Complete Rhetorical Precis

Nicholas Carr, in his essay *“Is Google Making Us Stupid?”* (2008), suggests that prolonged internet use is weakening people’s ability to concentrate and think deeply. Carr develops this argument by drawing on neuroscience research, by referencing historical changes in reading habits, and by sharing personal observations. Carr’s purpose is to raise concern about digital dependency in order to encourage readers to reflect on their media consumption habits. Carr writes for a general, technology-using audience and adopts a reflective and cautionary tone to emphasize the seriousness of the issue.

Common Student Errors (Avoid These)

- Writing **more than four sentences**
- Turning the precis into a **summary**

- Using weak verbs like *talks about* or *discusses*
 - Forgetting **purpose** or **audience**
 - Including personal opinions
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✅ Final Checklist

- ☐ Exactly 4 sentences
 - ☐ Present tense
 - ☐ Third person
 - ☐ Rhetorical verb used
 - ☐ Audience clearly identified
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📌 Key Reminder

A rhetorical precis answers **four questions**:

1. What is the argument?
2. How is it developed?
3. Why was it written?
4. Who is it for?

If all four are present — your precis is correct.
