

Writing the Précis

Précis—a concise abridgment; a summary; an abstract
Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged. 2nd ed.
1975.

Your writing task is to condense the original work with the least possible distortion. Thus, it is necessary to keep intact the arrangement and sequence of the original.

If your assignment is a very short précis, 100-150 words, you might confine everything to only one paragraph. For a longer précis, the normal principle of devoting a separate paragraph to each topic applies. If each major division, episode, scene, action, or section of the piece is considered a topic, then the précis may be divided into paragraphs devoted to each of the divisions. If you are writing a précis that includes literary criticism, also include the type of criticism as well as the information in the Works Cited page about the criticism as well as the primary source.

Steps to the perfect précis:

- Read the assigned work.
- Summarize only the salient details of your reading for your précis. A good rule for the length of the précis is about one-fourth to one-third the length of what you have chosen to read.
- Label the literary criticism as accurately as you can as either—
 - ❖ Traditional (either Biographical or Historical)—knowing the author's life aids understanding, or considering the time period and how it affects all aspects of the work
 - ❖ Formalistic—examining the work in isolation, a close reading of diction, imagery, detail, etc.
 - ❖ Psychological—analysis of characters through their psychological profiles, mostly Freudian analysis
 - ❖ Mythological—archetypal, Jungian, universal symbols and characters and situations
 - ❖ Feminist—focuses on the role (or lack of) women in the work

- Discuss the pros and cons of the work according to the type of criticism the author choose
- Conclude with a Works Cited, MLA format entry for the literary criticism as well as the primary source. (Include a Works Cited even if the only source is the primary source.)

Use the following example of an entry using MLA format for an essay found within a text:

Mack, Maynard. "The World of *Hamlet*." Ed. Sylvan Barnet. New York: Signet Classic, 1998. 191-213.