

Precise Précis

A Highly Structured Power Summary

This strategy works best with rich texts that are no more than three pages in length. It promotes critical analysis, ranking of evidence, and the ability to paraphrase. It also provides students with a shorthand for writing with historical thinking about sourcing and contextualization.

Annotation steps to take before writing your Precise Précis:

1. Read the text closely and underline the claims (or main ideas) as well as the evidence and reasoning used to substantiate the claims (main ideas).
2. Go back through the text, choose the most important claim/idea and number the evidence and reasoning according to how well it supports the author's assertion (1 is the most supportive).
3. Circle the details from the top two areas of reasoning and evidence that you want to include in your summary.
4. In the margin, write down what you know about the Big C and Little C context (Big C Context – something about the broader time period or Little C Context – what the author is responding to in that moment) of the time period.

In four power sentences, create a Precise Précis using the following formula:

Sentence 1: Provide the name of the author, the type of text (genre/primary or secondary), the date, and the title of the text followed by a marker verb that introduces the claim (argument) or main idea (informational).

Sentence 2: Using a new marker verb, explain the best support the author provides for the claim/main idea. Include at least three details from the text in your explanation.

Sentence 3: Using a new marker verb and a transition (e.g. additionally, to further demonstrate, to illustrate further, etc.) explain the next best support the author provides for the claim/main idea with at least three details from the text.

Sentence 4: Identify the context (Big C Context – something about the broader time period or Little C Context – what the author is responding to in that moment), the intended audience, and how the author is relating to that audience to make their point.

Power Sentences for a Precise Précis

Every sentence has a job. A sentence's job should be clear. If a sentence isn't doing its job, it needs to be fired or retrained.

Power Sentences are clear, concise, and specific.

- ✓ **Clarity:** there is no question about the meaning of your words; you address the question, topic, claim, etc. without going on tangents.
- ✓ **Concision:** all "unnecessary" words and phrases are removed; long sentences are fine if written with concision. Remove pieces of the sentence if they are unnecessary to the meaning. Try not to be repetitive (e.g. Many uneducated citizens ~~who have never attended school~~ continue to vote for better schools; "true fact," "twelve noon," "I saw it with my own eyes"). Use the shortest, clearest way to say something (e.g. period of five days v. five days, in spite of the fact that v. although).
- ✓ **Specificity:** when appropriate, all words and ideas are definable (or have a clear antecedent) – e.g. not "thing," "they," "some people," "in history," "over time," "factor," "situation," etc. Use the correct academic vocabulary instead of general language (e.g. Senate v. government, elect v. choose).

Sentence 1 – Sourcing/Claim Sentence

1. **WRITE:** What is the most important idea stressed by the author (claim, main idea)? Write this idea in a sentence in the space below using a marker verb.

2. **REFINE** (or have a partner refine) this sentence to make it clear, concise, and specific.
 - a. Take out all unnecessary information. Remember your audience – the reader does not want to read the whole article or learn every detail.

3. **ADD:** What sourcing information did you forget (author, date, type of text, short title of text)? Add it to the sentence you have just written using the least amount of words possible.
 - a. Consider using just the author’s last name, placing the year in parentheses and shortening a lengthy title.
 - b. If your title includes information that you already included, consider cutting that information from your sentence.

Sentence 4 – Context Sentence

4. **WRITE:** Before adding your evidence sentences, write your final sentence including important contextual elements and the author’s perspective / point of view / relationship to the audience.
 - a. Use the graphic to brainstorm before writing.



