

Delicate Balance Spring 2006 Précis

Directions

You will write a 2 page (plus or minus, depending on the length and complexity of the article) précis of each article assigned for this class. A précis can be defined as: a concise summary of essential points, statements, or facts (*Webster's Tenth Collegiate Dictionary*). You will add to the précis a paragraph that evaluates the strength of the argument or claim made in the article. This evaluation should be based on an analysis of the empirical data, explicit or implicit assumptions, quality of the sources, or logic of the article. You may make comparisons or contrasts to other articles or presentations.

The reasons for requiring the précis are several:

- Concisely summarizing a piece of writing requires you to read carefully and fully comprehend what you have read.
- Summarization as described also requires you to identify the central point and the most salient details or evidence. This is excellent training for comprehending and responding to any form of complex communication.
- The act of putting the summary to paper helps you develop a clarity and concision of language. It also provides practice in skillfully crafting effective expository prose.
- Evaluating the argument or claim helps you develop your skills of critical analysis.
- These précis also provide a check point for the faculty to see:
 - What you get from the reading.
 - Your strengths and weaknesses as a writer.
 - The sorts of evaluation you prefer, and your strengths or weaknesses with regard to varieties of evaluation.
 - Any difficulties you may be having of comprehension, interpretation, or analysis.
 - Ensuring that you are doing and thinking about the reading.

This form of précis is excellent training for graduate school work, professional work that requires summarization, analysis, and evaluation of complex written or spoken material (virtually all professional jobs), and will help build the skills you need to produce

excellent research-based, closely argued, well-supported reports, presentations, and other forms of communication.

Each précis will be given a numerical grade between 0 and 4. The number is an assessment of how your writing matches up to standards for:

- accuracy
- organization and coherence
- concision and clarity
- controlling idea and effectiveness of evaluation
- grammar

Each of these five areas will be rated according to the following scale. The overall rating for the précis will be derived from these sub-scores. Generally, you will need 2 or more 4s on the sub-scores to get a 4 overall for the piece.

0 = didn't do the assignment

1 = fails to meet the standard

2 = approaching the standard

3 = meets the standard

4 = exceeds the standards

Standards for précis writing:

	4	3	2	1
Accuracy	Meets all criteria for 3, but is particularly concise, insightful, and/or eloquent in capturing the author's claims.	Clearly identifies author's main point and the information and logical connections necessary to establishing the author's claim	Generally identifies author's main point and most of the information or logical connections necessary to establishing the claim. May have extraneous or slightly misstated information	Misconstrues author's main point; misses salient information or logical connections.
Organization and coherence	Meets all criteria for 3, but demonstrates particularly deft use of appropriate organizational patterns: chronological, historical, part to whole/whole to part, general to specific, sequential, etc.	The author's main idea is clearly stated and each paragraph follows logically from the preceding; each sentence advances or supports the claim of the paragraph; the whole follows a framework suited to the particular article's focus.	The author's main idea is hard to discern; has general overall coherence, stays on topic, but paragraphs do not consistently follow logically; sentences do not always clearly relate to each other; may have digressions; may have a lengthy opening and abrupt closure; may present random bits of information.	Generally incoherent; no transitions; shows little or no purposeful organization.
concision and clarity	Meets all criteria for 3, but particularly incisive.	Uses precise, economical language. No ambiguity of intent or meaning.	Meaning is generally but not always clear; slightly wordy or digressive.	Sloppy or inappropriate use of language. Wordy. Says little with many words.
controlling idea and effectiveness of evaluation	Meets all criteria for 3; plus particularly insightful and very well-supported.	A focused, well-stated, and clearly supported critique of the article.	One or more points being made; unclear what the focus of the critique is; inconsistent factual or logical support for the writer's evaluative position.	No central evaluative claim; no clear focus; little or no use of supporting details or argument.
grammar	No errors of punctuation, spelling, word choice, or grammatical relations.	Generally technically correct; may have a few minor errors, particularly with regard to less common usage.	Technical errors that begin to mar the clarity and coherence of the writing; disruptions to the readers flow.	Technical errors that make the essay difficult to read or comprehend.

