

How to Write a Rhetorical Summary

About this Lesson

A rhetorical summary, or rhetorical précis, is a structured summary of an argument, revealing the student's understanding of the author's purpose, the audience, and how the author constructs his/her argument. This summary can be used to introduce a rhetorical analysis, to provide context for quoted material for a synthesis essay or research paper, or as a simple exercise to demonstrate a student's understanding of a reading assignment.

Another way this strategy can be used is to have students write a summary, or précis, of their own persuasive essay. This should clarify for them their purpose, their audience, and the techniques they've used to construct their argument.

This lesson is included in Module 15: Issues and Assertions.

Objective

Students will

- follow a prescribed set of steps to write a rhetorical summary.

Level

High School

Connection to Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

LTF® Foundation Lessons are designed to be used across grade levels and therefore are aligned to the CCSS Anchor Standards. Teachers should consult their own grade-level-specific Standards.

The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

Explicitly addressed in this lesson

| Code | Standard | Level of Thinking | Depth of Knowledge |
|------|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| R.2 | Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. | Analyze | III |
| R.6 | Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. | Analyze | III |
| R.8 | Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. | Evaluate | III |
| W.4 | Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. | Create | III |

Implicitly addressed in this lesson

| Code | Standard | Level of Thinking | Depth of Knowledge |
|------|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| R.10 | Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. | Understand | II |
| L.1 | Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. | Understand | I |
| L.2 | Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. | Understand | I |
| W.10 | Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. | Apply | III |

LTF Skill Focus

The foundation for LTF English lessons is the Skill Progression Chart that identifies key skills for each domain, beginning with grade 6 and adding more complex skills at each subsequent grade level while reinforcing skills introduced at previous grade levels. The Skill Focus for each individual lesson identifies the skills actually addressed in that lesson.

| Levels of Thinking | | | | | |
|---|------------|---|---------|---|--------|
| Remember | Understand | Apply | Analyze | Evaluate | Create |
| Close Reading <i>written, spoken, and visual texts</i> | | Grammar <i>purposeful use of language for effect</i> | | Composition <i>written, spoken, and visual products</i> | |
| Reading Strategies Determining Audience Determining Author's Purpose Determining Main Idea Generalization Summary | | | | Types (modes) Expository analytical Persuasive (argumentative) claim The Process of Composition Prewriting consideration of audience determination of purpose | |

Connections to AP*

The ability to identify and write about an author's purpose and how an argument is constructed is necessary to write an effective rhetorical analysis essay, required on the AP Language and Composition Exam.

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Materials and Resources

- copies of Student Activity
- handout: "Determining Context for Evaluating an Argument"

Assessments

The following kind of formative assessment is embedded in this lesson:

- written rhetorical summary

Teaching Suggestions

After students have read an argument, teachers should have students complete the handout “Determining Context for Evaluating an Argument” (available on the LTF website) for that argument. Using the answers from this activity, students can construct their summary.

Teachers should model this activity for students before asking them to write a rhetorical summary on their own.

How to Write a Rhetorical Summary

A rhetorical summary is a way to “sum up” the ideas and purpose of a piece of nonfiction text. This summary can be used to introduce a rhetorical analysis, or it can be used to provide context for quoted material for a synthesis essay or research paper.

A rhetorical summary includes four sentences with a specific purpose for each.

The following examples use parts of the “Determining Context for Evaluating an Argument” chart for “Reading and Cell Phones: An Up and Coming Romance” by Terence W. Cavanaugh as a basis for the rhetorical summary.

Sentence 1:

- 1) Give the name of the author, the genre, and the title of the work.
- 2) Use a marker verb (and *that*) to
- 3) State the author’s major assertion/thesis.

From “Reading and Cell Phones: An Up and Coming Romance” by Terence W. Cavanaugh

| Questions to evaluate the argument | Answer |
|---|--|
| What claims does the writer/speaker make? | <i>Cells phones can be used for reading and writing.</i> |

- 1) “Reading and Cell Phones: An Up and Coming Romance” by Terence W. Cavanaugh
- 2) *claims that*
- 3) *cell phones can be used for reading and writing.*

Sample of Sentence 1:

In “Reading and Cell Phones: An Up and Coming Romance, an article in Florida Reading Quarterly, author Terence W. Cavanaugh claims that cell phones can be used for reading and writing.

Sentence 2:

Give two or three of the main points the author makes.

| Questions to evaluate the argument | Answer |
|---|--|
| What claims does the writer/speaker make? | <i>Cell phone technology is rapidly improving, and students are comfortable using this technology. Also, there is a wide variety of books available to be read on cell phones.</i> |

- 1) *Cell phone technology is rapidly improving.*
- 2) *Students are comfortable using this technology.*
- 3) *There is a wide variety of books available to be read on cell phones.*

Sample of Sentence 2:

Cavanaugh supports his claim by providing evidence of improving cell phone technology, student comfort with the technology, and the wide variety of books available to be read on cell phones.

Sentence 3: Give the author's purpose in writing the piece

| Questions to evaluate the argument | Answer |
|---|--|
| What is the writer's/speaker's purpose? | <i>To propose that teachers should think about using cell phone technology in their classrooms</i> |

Sample of Sentence 3:

Cavanaugh's purpose is to propose that teachers should think about using cell phone technology in their classrooms.

Sentence 4: Write

- 1) a basis for an inference about the audience, such as author's tone, the language he/she uses, or the types of examples
- 2) the author's name
- 3) a description of the intended audience and/or of the relationship the author attempts to establish with his audience

| Questions to evaluate the argument | Answer |
|---|--|
| Who is the audience? | <i>educators, especially reading teachers</i> |
| What assumptions about the audience does the writer/speaker make? | <i>Teachers have a negative attitude toward cell phones in school.</i> |
| What is the writer's attitude toward the subject? | <i>He is open and optimistic toward the use of cell phones to teach.</i> |

Sample of Sentence 4:

Based on Cavanaugh's open and optimistic attitude toward the use of cell phones to teach, and considering many teachers' negative attitudes about the topic, he is writing to educators who might be reluctant to incorporate this technology into their classrooms.

Rhetorical Summary Template

Sentence 1: Give the name of the author, the genre, and the title of the work. Be sure to use text analysis verbs and a “THAT clause” to state the author’s major assertion/thesis.

In _____, a/n _____,
(Write the name of the article) (Write the genre.)
author _____
(Write the name of the author.)
_____ that _____
(Use a marker verb.) (Write the major
assertion or thesis of the article.)

Sentence 2: Give two or three of the main points the author makes.

_____ supports his/her claim (through, by) _____
(Write the author’s name.)
_____.
(Write the main points the author uses to develop and support his assertion/thesis.)

Sentence 3: Give the author’s purpose in writing the piece.

_____ purpose is to _____
(Write the author’s name as a possessive.) (Write the author’s purpose.)

Sentence 4: Write a description of the intended audience and/or of the relationship the author attempts to establish with his audience based on inferences about the audience.

Based on the _____,
(Write a basis for the inference about the audience—such as tone, language, examples) (Write the author’s name.)
is writing (to/for) _____
(Write a description of the intended audience.)