

## Writing a Précis (Summary)

A précis (from the French, precise or condensed) is a summary, in your own words, of the work you have read.

- It briefly covers the important points in the work.
- It is not a paraphrase, and thus is not as long as the original work.
- It is objective and does not critique or evaluate the information.

### First Step – Read Actively

- Read the work through once.
- During this reading, pay attention to:
  - The author’s purpose;
  - The main ideas of the passage/article;
  - The author’s argument;
  - The support for the argument;
  - The author’s insights.
- This information will have to be concise and clear in your précis.

### Second Step – Summarize

- Read the work through again.
- Make a one-sentence summary of each paragraph or division in the text.
- Now you have created a basic outline of the work.

### Third Step – Writing

- Depending on the required length of the assignment, write a short introductory paragraph or sentence. This should include, at a minimum, the author, the title and the thesis or main idea.
- Use the sentences you wrote in the second step as details to develop your short précis paragraph or as topic sentences for the body paragraphs in a longer précis assignment.
- Keep the body paragraphs as concise as possible, but make sure to include the necessary information that you noted when reading the work through the first time (purpose, research, methods, insights, support).
- To conclude the précis, summarize the thesis in a new paragraph and list any recommendations made by the author.

## **Fourth Step – Editing and Proofreading**

- Check your précis against the assignment instructions to make sure it meets all requirements.
- Check the initial work to make sure you have made a complete summary and have not added any personal opinion.
- Check for correct spelling and grammar, clarity, and coherence.
- Finally, read your précis aloud.
- For additional information on editing and proofreading, please see our handout, *You've Written Your Essay – Now What? Editing and Proofreading*

### Sources Consulted:

O'Brien Moran, M. & Soiferman, K. L. (2014). *A student's guide to academic writing*. Toronto: Pearson Canada Inc.

Northey, M. & McKibbin, J. (2009). *Making sense: A student's guide to research and writing* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

Faigley, L., Graves, R. and Graves, H. (2014) *Brief penguin handbook* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River: Pearson Canada Inc.