

Rhetorical Précis **“Under the Influence”**

The **Rhetorical Précis** is a highly structured four sentence paragraph that records the essential elements of a unit of spoken or written discourse. For future readings, use this as your RP guide.

I. The first sentence includes the name of the writer (usually including a descriptive phrase); the work's genre, title, and date of publication; a rhetorically accurate verb ("asserts," "argues," "implies," "posits," etc., but not "writes" or "states"); and a *that clause* containing the central claim (thesis statement/major assertion) of the work.

II. The second sentence provides an explanation of how the writer develops and/or supports the thesis, usually in chronological order.

III. The third sentence explains the essays purpose followed by an *in order* phrase.

IV. The fourth sentence evaluates the value of the author's argument and provides reasons for that evaluation.

Below Your Précis add the following

- **Three Rhetorical Devices**

- **Three Discussion Questions:** 1 clarification question, 1 style questions, & 1 application question

- **Interesting, Memorable, or Provocative Quotation**

Try to fit this onto one page. You can single space.

An example is on the back

Brian Brainiac
Coach Weasel
AP Lang/ Am Lit
8 February 2016

“Slackers”

Précis

In “Slackers,” an essay originally published in *The New Yorker* in 2012, Malcolm Gladwell asserts that slack, “the gap between what is possible, under conditions of absolute effort, and actual performance,” is the typical *modus operandi* of most individuals. Through his profile of Alberto Salazar, an outlier who gave absolute effort, Gladwell uses a personal anecdote, examples from economists, and other descriptions of other athletes to support his thesis. Gladwell delineates the idea of slack in order to comment on the possibility for excellence and social mobility that giving absolute effort provides and to emphasize why giving absolute effort is so rare. Gladwell engagingly and effectively supports his argument with a variety of examples drawn from different areas of society and conveys why Alberto Salazar is a noteworthy figure.

Rhetorical Devices

- **Personal Anecdote:** “Whenever I take the freeway west from Toronto... I never wanted to do it again” (26). This anecdote provides Gladwell with credibility because he has experience running and with giving “absolute effort.” Also, it makes a connection with the reader.
- **Syntax** (sentence length): “He won, of course” (27). This sentence follows several longer sentences describing the Comrades ultramarathon. By including a short sentence, Gladwell emphasizes the accomplishment within the context of Salazar’s career.
- **Parallel Structure:** “Between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four, he said he ran an average of a hundred and five miles a week—through snowstorms and heat waves, illnesses and injuries” (29). The parallel structure (snowstorms...injuries) emphasizes that Salazar ran no matter what the conditions harkening back to the anecdote where Salazar ran with strep throat.

Discussion Questions

- Clarification: How old is Alberto Salazar?
- Style: How does the inclusion of secondary sources affect Gladwell’s central argument?
- Application: How can students use the ideas of slack and absolute effort to make decisions about schoolwork?

Quotation

“Social and economic mobility, in any system, is essentially slack arbitrage: hard work is a successful strategy for those at the bottom because those at the top no longer work so hard. By custom, we disparage the idleness of the idle rich. We should encourage it. It is our best chance of taking their place” (28).