

The Columnist Project

The Assignment: As a means of keeping abreast of public discourse issues, you are required to follow a national columnist in a newspaper. You must collect five current, preferably consecutive columns by your author. On my web site you will find links to columnists and journalistic web sites where you will find the name of a specific columnist and a link to her/his work. Archives can be searched on some of the columnist's sites, but many publications require payment for articles older than one or two weeks. Therefore, check your columnist's web site weekly. Due dates TBA. The assignment has three parts:

I. Each article must be annotated for the following:

- Speaker's tone and possible tone shifts
- Rhetorical strategies
- Organization and arrangement
- Aristotelian appeals

Mark places in the text that evoke a reaction from you, be it laughter, anger, or confusion.

Some questions to ask yourself as you read:

- How does s/he open the column?
- How does s/he close the column?
- How soon does s/he announce the thesis?
- How does s/he organize? What are the parts or sections of the column?
- How much is based on observation? Personal experience? Interviews? Fact?
- What sort of diction characterizes the columnist?
- What sort of syntax characterizes the columnist?
- What audience does s/he assume? How do you know?
- What unstated assumptions (warrants – enthymemes) does the columnist make?

II. After annotating, write a one-page précis (see other side).

Your first annotated article and one-page précis are due next week; if you are struggling I can give you some guidance.

III. The final task is to compose an argumentative essay *of your own* while synthesizing material from the columns. Based on the columns, consider:

- the issues the columnist has addressed in his/her columns
- a tangential issue you might expect your columnist to address;
- how the columnist might address your issue;
- your expectations of the columnist's position on the issue;
- how you would respond effectively to the columnist's position on the issue.

Do not simply address one argument raised in the columns, but create your own argument based on your perception of the columnist's ideological positions as you have perceived them.

OVER PLEASE

The Columnist Project: Writing a Précis

Rationale: A précis reveals your understanding of the arguments and points authors make in a specific piece. Composing a précis can be particularly useful when organizing sources for a research project or determining the utility of them.

Directions: When writing your one-page response, *objectively* summarize the article accurately in your own words by composing a précis. Below the précis, compose your response, noting any questions, objections or enlightenment generated by the column.

Note: Before you begin writing your précis, read the column a number of times to make sure you completely understand the author's rhetorical situation.

Example Précis

- The **first sentence** identifies the essay's author and title, provides the article's date in parentheses, uses some form of the verb "says" (claims, asserts, suggests, argues) followed by "that," and the essay's thesis (paraphrased or quoted).
Example: In his "In Defense of Prejudice" (1995), Jonathan Rauch argues that prejudice in society should not be eliminated.
- The **second sentence** describes the author's support for the thesis, usually in chronological order.
Example: Rauch supports his position by providing anecdotal and historical evidence culled from segments of society which illustrates the futility and harm associated with attempts to eliminate prejudice.
- The **third sentence** analyzes the author's purpose using an "in order to" statement.
Example: Rauch hopes to shift the paradigm away from absolutism, the idea of punitive action against racism and prejudice, in order to move society toward rejection, the idea of societal pressure when grappling with racist and prejudicial attitudes.
- The **fourth sentence** describes the essay's intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.
Example: The author uses an erudite, yet defensive tone indicating that he primarily addresses a rather liberal intellectual audience.