EFL Students' Perception on the Use of "Rhetorical Précis" as a Summarizing Template

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Abstract:

For university students, a skill in writing a good summary of articles, books and other sources is very important. Rhetorical Précis, a summarizing template that consists of four dense and direct sentences, can be used to compose a precise summary. This research aims at exploring EFL students' perceptions of the use of Rhetorical Précis. Using a survey study, a five-degree questionnaire was spread out to 47 students who had attended the Critical Reading course at a reputable university in Surabaya, Indonesia. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. In addition, a semi-structured interview was held with four of the students. The interview was recorded and transcribed to meet the need of this study. The findings of this study showed that most of the students had positive perceptions of each element of Rhetorical Précis. In short, the students perceived that the Rhetorical Précis summarizing template could be used by the students to make a summary of the original texts precisely and accurately.
Keywords*: EFL students, Rhetorical Précis (RP), summarizing template*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, information is swiftly produced and absorbed; therefore, summarizing becomes one of the easy and economical ways to grasp and retain information. Khathayut & Karavi, (2011) defined summarizing as "an activity in restating the author's main ideas by using reported speech and paraphrasing in which the result of summarizing must be shorter than

the original text." Among people who need to grasp a lot of information, university students apparently need the summarizing skill. Thus, instead of copying an author's ideas and words directly, the students could use their own versions of ideas and words without stating their personal opinion. Thus, a summary is supposed to be a condensed and precise text and it reflects the gist of the original text.

Recent studies on summarizing reported that summarizing enables students to have better reading comprehension, transfer the information to a long-term memory, develop and strengthen their vocabularies, improve their writing organization, and focus on keywords that are worth noting and worth remembering (Cahyono, 2015; Huan et al., 2017; Özdemir, 2018). In making a good summary, students have to make sure that none of the main ideas is lost and the main gist in the original text is not changed. Moreover, a summary should show 'the big picture of a text and be able to reduce confusion among the readers when reading the original text which is more complex.

In an academic context, especially in tertiary education, university students are obliged to read essays, articles, or books that provide valuable information for the sake of their studies. Then, it is necessary for them to make a summary to help them comprehend and prevent losing the information they have read. Torres (2015) in her study mentioned that teachers use a summarizing strategy to help students better understand the reading texts. As a result, those who have good reading comprehension are supposed to produce a good summary. Moreover, Mokeddem & Houcine (2016) mentioned Shanahan's theory called 'bidirectional hypothesis' which refers to the positive relationship between reading and writing as an interactive and interdependent skill. In other words, both of these skills are related and they influence each other.

Although these students are equipped with summarizing strategies, most of them still have problems in finding the main idea and organizing it into their writing. Cahyono (2015) investigated how the Indonesian EFL students represented their ideas from journal articles into a summary. Based on the study, it was found that 25% of the students were able to make a summary with their sentences. However, another 25% of them directly copied the author's words without paraphrasing it and 37.5% of them also copied the author's words and ideas but with some modifications. Although this Cahyono (2015) study involved graduate EFL students, the results showed that not all of them could restate the main idea of the journal articles into a good summary.

Meanwhile, research studies reported some ways in summarizing which are not appropriate. Huan et al., (2017) examined the students' perceptions of summarizing strategy in reading comprehension in EFL classes. However, there were some contradictory results in this study. It was claimed that the students were aware of the role of summarizing strategy in reading comprehension. They also agreed to have more practice in writing a summary. However, some of them considered that summarizing was a difficult task and a waste of time. Moreover, they thought that a long summary was better than a short summary. A summarizing strategy training for students, Özdemir (2018) discovered that 15 students did not make brief notes to start the summary. Similar to Huan et al., (2017) findings, these students preferred to produce a long summary than the brief one, which is not in line with the idea of summarizing.

In the English Department of a well-known state university in Surabaya, Indonesia, a real practice in teaching how to make a summary indicated that some of the students failed to get the gist of a text and to transfer it into a summary due to the absence of effective steps and templates. Therefore, one of the teachers who taught critical reading course introduced the use of Rhetorical Précis (RP) to the students. The practice in the use of RP in the English Department of the university inspired us to look into the students' perception on the use of Rhetorical Précis as a summarizing template. By looking at the purpose, the similarity between this study and other studies is that they both try to see students' perception of summarizing by using a survey. However, the main difference is that this study focused on students' perception on using Rhetorical Précis which has not been discussed yet by the other studies. Based on the consideration, a research problem is formulated as follows: How is the students' perception on the implementation of Rhetorical Précis in their class?

2. Literature Review

A Rhetorical Précis (RP) is a summarizing template that was developed by Woodworth (1988). The word *"Précis"* was derived from French that means "specific" or "precise." By looking at the meaning, it is designed to concisely get the content of a text and how to convey the content of the text. The information from RP reflects the *who, what, where, when, how, why,* and *to whom* a text is. Although it is an old template, it is useful to improve the quality of students' learning and develop the goals in interdisciplinary writing. For instance, to support students when they read a text and listen to an audio material, to question and evaluate what they read and hear, and to write and speak confidently in any situation (Woodworth, 1988). Hall (2017) claimed that it sharpened students' critical reading since they analyze the author's arguments as well. Moreover, it can be treated as a kind of annotated bibliography that contains the summary of references.

The template of rhetorical précis consists of four dense but direct sentences that are timesaving since the students know what to include in their summaries (see Figure 1). The first sentence includes the name of the author, genre, title of work, date in parentheses, a rhetorically active verb such as *assert, argue, suggest*, and a *'that'* clause containing the major assertion of the work. Thus, before making an RP, the students should be introduced to the differences between assertions, arguments, and the verbs provided.

The template of Rhetorical Précis

➢ **Sentence One (Who, Where, When, What)**

_____ in the _____ , _____ , _____ that
(Author)   (A)   (Title)   (B)

_____ _____ .

➢ **Sentence Two (How)**

_____ supports his / her _____ by _____
(Author's last name)   (B)   (C)

➢ **Sentence Three (Why)**

The author's purpose is to _____ in order to _____
                          (D)

➢ **Sentence Four (To Whom)**

The author writes in _____ tone for _____
                      (E)   (audience)

Word bank – some possibilities

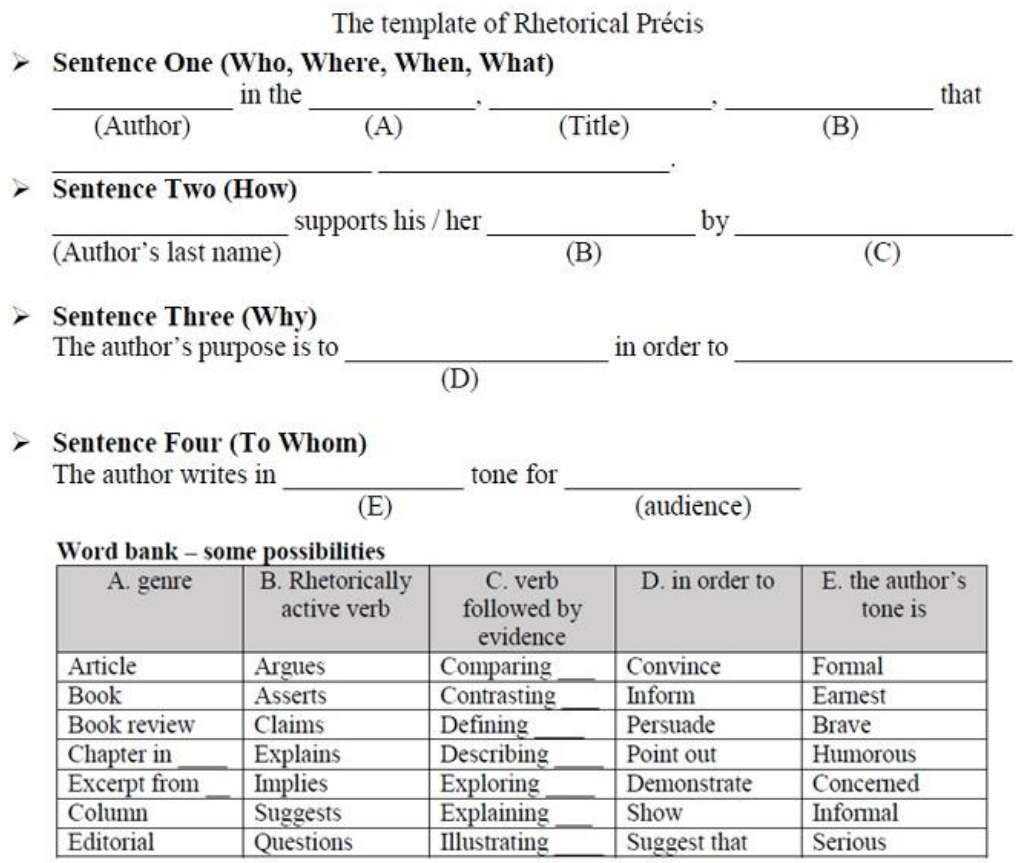| A. genre	B. Rhetorically active verb	C. verb followed by evidence	D. in order to	E. the author's tone is
Article	Argues	Comparing ___	Convince	Formal
Book	Asserts	Contrasting ___	Inform	Earnest
Book review	Claims	Defining ___	Persuade	Brave
Chapter in ___	Explains	Describing ___	Point out	Humorous
Excerpt from __	Implies	Exploring ___	Demonstrate	Concerned
Column	Suggests	Explaining ___	Show	Informal
Editorial	Questions	Illustrating ___	Suggest that	Serious

Figure 1. The Template of Rhetorical Précis (Woodworth, 1988)

The second sentence covers an explanation of how the author develops and supports the main idea. In this case, the students have to discover and analyze their strategies carefully. Even though there are some word banks provided below the template such as *'comparing', 'describing' or 'illustrating'*, a thorough analysis is required to obtain the right information. Meanwhile, the third sentence conveys the author's purpose, whether it is to convince, inform, or others, and it is followed by an *'in order to'* phrase. It is easier if the purposes are explicitly stated in the original text, not implicitly stated. Finally, the last sentence contains a description of the intended audience and the author's tone. It is used to see whether the author writes in a formal, informal, or other tones, and to check whether or not the articles are suitable and appropriate for the readers.

Just like the writing process in general, writing an RP cannot be done in just one meeting. Guided practice, group discussion, and revision are needed to let the students gain confidence and have control over what they want to include in their précis. Although many studies related to summarizing strategy have been reported, there is no development or study in the use of Rhetorical Précis (RP), especially with regard to the students' perception on it. In response to this issue, this study aims at exploring students' perceptions on the use of Rhetorical Précis as a summarizing template in their Critical Reading class.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study used a survey as a research design to find out student's perception of using Rhetorical Précis as a summarizing template. It involved 47 students from batch 2015 (22 students), 2016 (13 students), and 2017 (12 students) who had attended the Critical Reading course in their fourth semester at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, a well-known university in Surabaya City, East Java, Indonesia. These students have completed the course and had the experience in writing summaries by using the Rhetorical Précis summarizing template.

In the Critical Reading course the students were not directly required to make a Rhetorical Précis. Yet, the lecturer started by introducing each element in the template separately. For example, the first up to the third meeting were used discuss how to identify arguments, claims, evidence, and reasonings. Then, some exercises and group discussions were provided to check students' understanding. Starting from the fourth meeting, the lecturer introduced the Rhetorical Précis including the purpose, the template, the use, and the beneficial aspects. Then, the students' practiced in the following meetings to make a Rhetorical Précis. In the final exam, they were obliged to write down a précis that summarizes the key concepts of the article *"What Makes EFL Students Establish Good Reading Habits in English"* written by Iftanti (2015). Since they have passed the course and produced some précis, they are expected to give their perception on the use of Rhetorical Précis.

3.2 Instruments & Data Analysis

To find out students' perception on the use of Rhetorical Précis, a questionnaire was given to them (see the Questionnaire in Appendix A). The questionnaire referred to the rubric for scoring the Rhetorical Précis and it was developed based on Cahyono (2018) style to meet the purpose of this study. It is in the form of a five-degree Likert scale from *'strongly disagree'* to *'strongly agree'* and it consists of four elements which are presented in ten items. The first element include *'author, genre, and title'* to see whether the students can identify them correctly or not (Items 1-3). The second element contains *'rhetorical verb and author's main claim'* to check if they can find the author's main claim including their use of the rhetoric verb (Items 4-5) and *'support'* to find how they identify the author's way to develop his or her main claim (Item 6). The third element refers to *'purpose'* to see whether they can find the author's purpose which links to the main claim (Items 7-8). The last element contains *'tone and audience'* to identify how the students explain the author's tone and the intended audience (Items 9-10).

To gain insights into students' perception and as the follow up for the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview was conducted to four students (see Appendix B for the interview questions). The six questions for the interview are adapted from Huan et al., (2017) related to summarizing strategies. The data from the interview were recorded, transcribed, and organized to cover the needs of this study. As part of this study, the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview questionss were validated by a university lecturer who is an expert in second and foreign language writing.

4. Findings

The findings of the study are explained on the basis of the four elements of the Rhetorical Précis summarizing template. The first element in the questionnaire is used to see whether or not the students can identify the author, title, and genre correctly. The students' perception on the first element of RP is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of the First Element in RP.

No	Questionnaire Items	Total Value	N	Average
1.	I can correctly identify the author's name.	210	47	4.46
2.	I can write the title punctuated correctly.	203	47	4.31
3.	I can correctly identify the genre of the source I read.	190	47	4.04

Table 1 shows that most of the students responded positively to the first element of RP since the average is around 4. For Item 1, many of the students (85%) chose to 'strongly agree' and 'agree,' meaning that they can identify the author's name correctly. Since it is the basic thing, none of them had difficulty in identifying the author's name. Items 2 and 3 had similar findings as these items were chosen by many of the students (82.9% and 74.5%, respectively). They could write and identify the title and the genre of the source correctly. However, in the interview Student 3 and Student 4 mentioned that sometimes they were confused about how to determine the sources, whether it is a book, a book review, or a chapter in a book (see Figure 1 for the examples of the genre). In general, the analysis of the students' responses revealed that they had positive perception on the first element in Rhetorical Précis summarizing template.

The findings for the second element were not as high as the first element. The most frequently chosen scales were 'neither agree nor disagree' and 'agree,' meaning that some of the students had neutral perception on Items 4-6. The average scores of the students' responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of the Second Element in RP

No	Questionnaire Items	Total Value	N	Average
4.	I can identify the author's main claim.	176	47	3.74
5.	I know how to develop the author's claim by using the rhetorical verbs.	170	47	3.61
6.	I can address the evidence of the author's claim by using accurate language.	176	47	3.74

Table 2 shows that the average scores of the students' responses is close to 4. For Item 4, Student 1 and Student 3 explained in the interview that identifying the author's main claim needed an extensive, critical reading, and thorough analysis. Otherwise, they would not be able to find the right claim. Thus, not all of the students thought it was easy to do. The same

case happened for Items 5 and 6. Based on the interview, all of the four students mentioned that sometimes it was hard to develop and address the evidence of the author's claim. This is because they had to use their critical thinking to determine whether the author contrasts, combines, or explores some theories or previous studies. Therefore, their responses to the second element were not that high due to some difficulties they faced.

The third element in the RP is about the author's purpose and the link between the purpose and the main claim. Similar to the previous element, the results were below 4. Table 3 presents the students' perception on the third element in RP.

Table 3. Students' Perception of the Third Element in RP

No	Questionnaire Items	Total Value	N	Average
7.	I can identify the author's purpose correctly.	183	47	3.89
8.	I can link the author's purpose with his or her main claim.	178	47	3.78

Table 3 indicates that the students' average scores are close to 4, meaning that most of the students had positive perception on the third element in RP. For Item 7, more than half of the students (53.2%) agreed that they could identify the author's purpose correctly. Meanwhile, the other students chose 'neither agree nor disagree' and 'strongly agree'. Based on the interview, it was found out that they were able to identify the author's purpose when it is stated explicitly. On the other hand, if the author's purpose is stated implicitly, it was difficult for them to find it. According to them, just like finding the claim, identifying the author's purpose should be done carefully and critically. Item 8 also needs thorough analysis so that the students can link the author's purpose with the claim. Despite the difficulty that they may face, most of the students responded positively to the third element, meaning that RP could help them to determine the author's purpose correctly.

The fourth element in RP deals with the author's tone and the targeted audience. Even though it is not as difficult as the second and third elements, it received esponses which were close to 4. Table 4 for shows the students' perception on the fourth element of RP.

Table 4. Students' Perceptions of the Fourth Element in RP

No	Questionnaire Items	Total Value	N	Average
9.	I can accurately identify the author's tone.	170	47	3.61
10.	I can clearly explain who the targeted audience is.	192	47	4.08

Based on the findings, most of the students 'agreed' that they could identify the author's tone correctly. Moreover, the interview, all of the four students claimed that they felt the author's tone while reading the sources (Item 9). Thus, it is quite easy for them to determine whether the author writes in formal, humorous, or concerned tone. For Item 10, it is even easier for the students to guess the targeted audience based on the tone and the main

discussion. Student 2 stated in the interview: "'we can just feel to whom the author writes for. If the tone is formal and the discussion mainly talks about education, for example, then the targeted audience must be educators, practitioners, or even students.*"* As a result, most of the students showed positive perception in that they can identify the author's tone and the intended audience accurately.

All in all, students' responses on the Questionnaire Items 1 to 10 reveal that most of them had a positive feeling and agreed that the elements in Rhetorical Précis were useful for them.

5. Discussion

This research was intended to find out students' perception on the use of Rhetorical Précis summarizing template. The findings of this study indicated that most of the students had positive perception on each element of RP. Thus, by using the RP template, they were able to create an effective summary. Besides, from he interview, it was apparent that the students reported the positive perception on the use of the summarizing template, although they found it difficult to identify the author's main claim and purposes. To overcome this problem, guided practice, exposure, and revision are needed to support them in taking control of what to include in their Rhetorical Précis. It has been stated by W (2009) and Li (2014) that greater exposure facilitates students to use summarizing strategies for the improvement of their learning.

The first finding of this study showed that none of the students had troubles when identifying the author's name and the title. This is because the author's name and the title are written explicitly and can be seen clearly. The first sentence in the summary should introduce the author (by name) and the title enclosed in quotation marks (Nelson, 2020; Walden University, 2017) This statement is in line with that of Woodworth (1988) who stated that the author's name and the title are used to show the identity of the text which the students have read. Thus, they should not write them in the wrong way. In terms of determining the sources, some of the students mentioned that sometimes they were confused with the sources, whether it is a book, a book review, or a chapter in a book. This is understandable when they are not introduced to the kinds of sources. Therefore, providing the definition and examples of sources are needed in writing a Rhetorical Précis. For instance, books, journal articles, conference proceedings, dissertations, and theses belong to primary sources. Meanwhile, book review, chapter in a book, review article, summaries reported in textbooks, magazines, and newspapers belong to secondary sources (Cronin Bsc & Cronin, 2008).

The second finding of the study showed that the students' responses were positive although the responses were not as high as the first finding. This is because the second element in RP deals with the identification of the author's main claim and how it is developed or supported. According to the students who were interviewed, detailed analysis, critical reading, and critical thinking were required to fill the second element. As Özdemir, (2018) pointed out, summarizing should involve critical reading and thinking since the writers have to focus on worth-noting keywords. Thus, it is the main gist or the main claim that should be included in a summary or in the RP. In terms of the relationship between Rhetorical Précis and critical reading, Hall (2017) claimed that RP will improve students' critical reading as the

students analyze the author's claims or arguments. Besides, Janet Giltrow (2002) mentioned that active reading, one of the tools to foster critical reading skills, covers the second element in RP since the students should discover the author's meaning, main ideas, and supporting ideas. Thus, eventhough it is quite difficult, the second element in RP to some extent covers detailed analysis, critical reading, and critical thinking. Without these aspects, the summary or the RP will not show 'the big picture' of the source. As a result. It may ruin the readers' focus.

Third, writing an RP also requires the students to identify the author's purpose and its link with the main claim. Based on the questionnaire and interview, the students agreed that they could find the purpose and its link to the main claim correctly although they needed careful and critical reading. These activities are closely related to reading comprehension. This is because the author's purpose is one of the important parts of reading comprehension (Torres, 2015). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, summarizing is used as a strategy to see students' real reading comprehension of the texts (Torres, 2015). Thus, by creating an RP, the students will also train their reading comprehension. In other words, if they have good reading comprehension, they will be able to find the author's purpose, and other elements in the RP correctly.

Some previous studies also claimed that summarizing is linked intimately to reading comprehension since the writers should fully get the idea of the text (Kintsch & Van Dijk 1978 as cited in Li, 2014). Moreover, Mokeddem & Houcine (2016) mentioned the 'bidirectional hypothesis' which refers to the positive relationship between reading and writing as interactive and interdependent skills. Just like the previous element, the third element also acts as the main core of summarizing. The students must know whether the author writes the article or book to inform a new idea, introduce a new theory, or show a contra to the existing theory. As a result, they will be able to know the practical or theoretical contributions of the sources they have read. Despite the challenge in finding out the purpose and its link with the main claim, most of the students responded positively that they could do the third element accurately.

Recognizing the author's tone and the intended audience become the last element in writing a Rhetorical Précis. It was found that most of the students agreed that they could identify the author's tone and intended audience correctly since they could sense them while reading the texts. By knowing the author's tone the reader can identify the author's purpose in writing the text (Oka, 2014). For instance, if the author's tone is formal in an educational topic, then he or she wants to inform or convince important information. These findings and the RP template match the tools to improve critical reading discussed by Janet Giltrow (2002). Giltrow mentioned that recognizing the writer persona (the author's presence or tone in his or her work) and figuring out the point of view to know whether the text is written objectively or subjectively are the two ways to see the interrelation between reading and writing, particularly summarizing. From the statements, it can be inferred that this finding supports the existing theory, namely summarizing by using Rhetorical Précis, which is linked to critical reading. Since the last element is not that difficult, most of the students had positive perception as they could identify the author's tone and the intended audience easily.

In light of the findings and discussion, this study highlights that students' perception on the use of Rhetorical Précis were mostly positive. In other words, most of them agreed that they can make a summary by using Rhetorical Précis. In terms of the contribution, this study gives a theoretical contribution to the existing theory. Since the findings mentioned that the implementation of RP is good, then the lecturers or the teaching staff can continue applying it in a writing class. In brief, this discussion section has shown few theories and how they relate to the findings, as well as further explanations of the findings. Despite the result, this study needs further improvement since it has some limitations and weaknesses.

6. Conclusions

This study has examined students' perception on the use of Rhetorical Précis as a summarizing template when they attended a Critical Reading course. This template consists of four elements that enable the students to compose an accurate summary. The first element deals with the author's name, genre, and title. The second element is about the author's main claim and how he or she develops it by using the rhetorical verb. The third element is the author's purpose and how it links with the main claim. The last element is the author's tone and the targeted audience. Overall, the findings of the study showed students' positive perception on the use of Rhetorical Précis. Even though some of them faced some difficulties, they stated that Rhetorical Précis was useful and helped them to write a good summary. They also mentioned that by practicing, analyzing thoroughly, and reading critically, they were able to master a summarizing skill by using the Rhetorical Précis.

Some suggestions were addressed to the students, the writing lecturers, and future researchers. It will be more effective if the college students use this template for creating a well-structured summary. Since this study indicated positive perception of the students, the writing lecturers can implement this template in their second or foreign language writing classrooms. However, some aspects such as how to identify the author's claim, the purpose, and the kinds of sources should be taught beforehand. For the development of this study, the future researchers can conduct research on the same topic with different concerns, for instance, the appropriate steps of the implementation, the assessment rubric, the effectiveness of the implementation, the content analysis of students' summaries by using the template. Besides, they need to present more critical and specific literature reviews, analyses, and discussions.

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APPENDIX A. The Questionnaire

Instruction: This questionnaire is aimed at finding out your perception of the implementation of Rhetorical Précis in your critical reading class. Read the statements carefully and give tick (✓) to one of the scales that you think corresponds with your perception. The five scales are Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAD), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

No	Statements	Scales				
		SD	D	NAD	A	SA
1.	I can correctly identify the author's name.					
2.	I can write the title punctuated correctly.					
3.	I can correctly identify the genre of the source I read.					
4.	I can identify the author's main claim.					
5.	I know how to develop the author's claim by using the rhetorical verbs.					
6.	I can address the evidence of the author's claim by using accurate language.					
7.	I can identify the author's purpose correctly.					
8.	I can link the author's purpose with his or her main claim.					
9.	I can accurately identify the author's tone.					
10.	I can clearly explain who the targeted audience is.					

APPENDIX B. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What do you think about the summarizing strategy by using the Rhetorical Précis?
2. When writing a summary by using the Rhetorical Précis, do you have any difficulty in identifying the author, the title, and the genre? Why or why not?
3. How do you find and express the author's main claim?
4. How do you identify the author's way to develop his or her main claim?
5. When writing a summary by using the Rhetorical Précis, can you easily recognize the author's purpose in conducting the study? Why or why not?
6. When writing a summary by using Rhetorical Précis, how do you identify the author's tone and the intended audience?