

Feminist Science Fiction Archive Artifact Précis

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In general, a précis is a critical, often professional summary. Summary is a skill important to reading, writing, and academic inquiry. On the one hand, summarizing is about distilling or condensing a text, outlining a text's main ideas, putting into your own words an overview of the most important parts of a text. On the other hand, summarizing is about digesting the text, understanding what you need from it so that you can make decisions about the text. What is important about the text? What are its main arguments? Does it connect to your writing, your research? Does it speak to other texts or contexts? In other words, the skill and art of summary is often the first step in reading, writing, and inquiry since you need to “get” the text before you can ask questions of it or enter into conversation with it. Summary is important when you want to quick gloss, an academic sound bite that provides

your writing and your reader with the gist of a useful text. Though a summary is not an “active” argument, it is still a kind of persuasion; the decisions you make—what you choose to include or exclude—reveal what you think is key and important.

Goals and Outcomes

For this précis, you visit the University of Oregon's Special Collection's Feminist Science Fiction Archive. You will explore any part of the archive, perhaps focusing on the papers and materials of Ursula K. Le Guin or James Tiptree, Jr. or Joanna Russ. Look for something of interest to you whether it be correspondence between writers, drafts of stories or novels, drawings, art, or maps, or other work. With the help of the archive staff, locate a range of things to peruse. Then select **one** artifact to write your précis. Generate what you think the most significant details, information, and descriptions for your artifact. Your précis should be specific, detailed, focused on what you decide are the most salient points. Because the summary is supposed to be short and precise, get to the heart of the matter, make decisions about what is vital to include in your paper, and avoid unnecessary generalizations irrelevant to the artifact. Your précis should include and address a combination of the following (but not as a laundry list):

- 1) A brief introduction to the artifact, the creator or author, and its context (i.e. date, who was it for, why was it created or written)
- 2) Physical description, if warranted, especially if it is something more than text
- 3) Summary of content, selecting the most important idea(s) or takeaway(s)
- 4) Observations (not personal reactions) as to the archival value or usefulness of the artifact

Keep in mind that this is not a personal response only. An outstanding précis does more than describe what the artifact is or what the content is about. An outstanding summary is selective, precise, and connects the details to the artifact's place in the archive or in the goals of feminist science fiction perhaps. Finally, an outstanding summary has a goal in mind and reveals the analytical choices you made. Much in the same way you might write summary for an annotated bibliography, the artifact précis is an annotation for the artifact at hand. Choose wisely!

Guidelines and Due Dates

Format: formal, academic paper, précis paper formatting
1-2 pages only, typed, no title page, single-spaced, standard paragraphing, proper heading, neatly single-side printed
MLA citation and documentation, bibliography (for outside sources) if necessary
see the course policies for response paper formatting guidelines

Due: Tuesday, October 25, at the start of class