

**TTR**

Traduction, terminologie, rédaction



**Pamela Russell. *How to Write a Précis*. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1988, 76 p.**

**Judith Woodsworth**

Volume 3, Number 1, 1er semestre 1990

L'agora de la traduction

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/014739ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/014739ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (print)

1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Woodsworth, J. (1990). Review of [Pamela Russell. *How to Write a Précis*. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1988, 76 p.] *TTR*, 3(1), 131–133.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/014739ar>

on in the translation for image-related occurrences that could not be translated.

The author shows time and again, with a zeal worthy of a worthier cause, that the translations do indeed fit the scheme she has set up. Circular reasoning is taken to extremes and the book fizzles out after a sufficient quota of examples has been analyzed.

The author has certainly given proof of her ability to work hard and to summarize clearly, logically and intelligibly. And that is precisely what those who sit in judgement over doctoral dissertation must be convinced of. Most readers, however, want some information out of a book, and need not be subjected to this type of demonstration.

It is a pity that so much time, energy and intelligence have been invested in this kind of study which merely «proves» what has already been proved over and over again. Obviously, the author herself is not to blame; instead, blame rests with the institution or institutions that award doctoral dissertations on the basis of this kind of work.

André Lefevere  
University of Texas at Austin

**Pamela Russell. *How to Write a Précis*. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1988, 76 p.**

At a time of steady advances in the field of translation studies and of an increasing awareness of the importance of translation pedagogy, it is surprising that there has not been more work done to produce effective teaching tools. This slim volume, while not specifically scholarly in nature, makes a refreshing addition to the meager body of translation textbooks. Drawing on her teaching experience at the University of Ottawa, the author makes judicious use of theoretical concepts in a straightforward and unpretentious manner and sets out a systematic method for teaching and acquiring skills of unquestionable practical value.

Précis-writing, a specialized type of summarizing, consists in reducing a text to one-third of the original length. It was developed essentially for two purposes: as a means of teaching language skills and as a means of testing people's linguistic and intellectual abilities. Some translation programs include précis-writing courses, and précis-writing as an exercise can be used in any writing course. The task of précis-writing involves a highly complex process of reading, understanding and rewriting and hence helps to develop analytical abilities as well as writing skills.

*How to Write a Précis* is intended as a textbook for students and as a guide for teachers. The manual defines the précis and compares it with other forms of summaries such as abstracts, popularized abridgements and so on. Summaries are viewed as «surrogate texts» in the context of a wider theory of intertextuality. Useful historical background is provided with an overview of how the précis has been used in the past as a testing tool and pedagogical device. A thorough methodology is then provided: this is the actual «how-to» component of the book, with a step-by-step approach and a sample text that is first analyzed and then summarized. The manual contains two appendices for teachers: one offers guidelines for evaluating the précis, along with correction symbols and a typology of errors, the other appendix sets out a proposed writing skills program for translators.

The author provides a bibliography of over 30 titles. While padded with some well-known titles that could be found in any general bibliography — such as Jean Delisle's *l'Analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction*, for example — the bibliography does list a number of works specifically pertaining to the subject at hand.

The second section of the manual contains a series of exercises that follow a logical progression, beginning with simple reading and comprehension exercises and working up to summarizing articles, correspondence and even spoken texts. The exercises illustrating the various ways to achieve brevity — through vocabulary choice, through generalizing, etc. — are particularly entertaining and useful in any context. One wishes there were more of these.

Students are gradually exposed to précis-writing itself, involving the production of a summary written in the same language, and are later presented with the challenge of what the author calls «interlingual précis-writing», or summarizing in English a text originally written in French. For advanced students the manual includes exercises in popularization and abstracting. In every case, the author provides sample originals and summaries to guide both students and teachers.

To my knowledge, there has not yet been a comprehensive manual of précis-writing in the context of English-language teaching. Here is a book for teachers and students applicable either to précis-writing courses *per se* or to English language or English translation courses in which précis-writing can be used as one of several means to improve the students' command of written English.

The book is written in a clear, readable and engaging style, and the material is presented in a logical, orderly fashion. Pamela Russell thus makes an important, if highly specific and somewhat limited contribution to the teaching of English writing and translation.

Judith Woodsworth  
Concordia University

**Jean-René Ladmiral et Edmond Marc Lipiansky.**  
*La Communication interculturelle.* Paris, Armand Colin,  
1989, 318 p.

Jean-René Ladmiral est fort connu dans le domaine de la traduction. En effet, on lui doit un important ouvrage, *Traduire: théorèmes pour la traduction*, et plusieurs articles plus récents, dont ses contributions à la *Revue d'esthétique* et à la *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* qui ont fait l'objet de commentaires dans ces pages. Dans *la Communication interculturelle*, il prend la parole en collaboration avec un spécialiste de la psychologie sociale pour aborder les questions plus générales de l'identité et de l'altérité culturelles.

Pour les auteurs, le terme «interculturel» implique «l'idée d'inter-relations, de rapports et d'échanges entre cultures différentes» (p. 10). Il s'agit en l'occurrence de relations entre Français et Allemands, et plus particulièrement de stages effectués dans le cadre de programmes de formation-recherche commandités par l'Office franco-allemand pour la jeunesse. Selon une démarche méthodologique empruntée à la dynamique de groupes, les auteurs procèdent à l'analyse d'une pratique, celle des rencontres de jeunes venus des deux pays, pour en arriver à la conceptualisation théorique des relations interculturelles. L'observation et l'analyse portent sur le discours tenu par les participants, discours bilingue et «traduit», comme on le verra, ainsi que sur leurs comportements dans le groupe.

L'ouvrage est divisé en trois parties. La première examine les relations entre le langage et la culture en proposant un paradigme linguistique de la communication interculturelle. L'approche psychosociolinguistique qui est à la base du premier volet de l'étude est poursuivie dans la deuxième où surgissent les problèmes reliés aux identités culturelles. L'analyse des comportements des individus est complétée dans la troisième partie par une étude des représentations que chaque culture se fait de l'autre, au moyen d'une enquête sur l'«imagologie», c'est-à-dire sur les stéréotypes culturels.