



Book Reviews

Writing a book review requires analytical thinking. It is your opportunity to give readers an evaluation of a book's value and show how the author did or did not achieve a purpose. You will also show readers why the book matters. Here are some techniques for writing book reviews.

Approaches to Book Reviewing

Descriptive review:

A descriptive review is one in which the writer, without over-enthusiasm or exaggeration, gives the essential information about a book. This is done by description and exposition, by stating the perceived aims and purposes of the author, and by quoting striking passages from the text.

Critical review:

A critical review is an extension of the descriptive. In addition to telling what the book is about, the review must also analyze the value of the book. The critical review asserts a judgement of the book's worth and defends that judgement using critical reading skills and perspectives gained from other readings and class discussions.

Book Review Essentials

Description of ideas expressed in the book

Rather than a summary of the book's plot and/or structure, offer a synthesis of the main ideas and the author's apparent purpose.

Information about the author that is relevant to the review

Avoid a full biography but include details that inform us of the author's perspective on the topic.

Analysis of the author's purpose

This includes a statement of your understanding of the author's purpose; how well you feel the author's purpose has been achieved; and evidence to support your judgement of the author's execution.

Before Writing

1. Read the book closely and critically, including any preface/forward/introduction. These will provide insight to the author's purpose.
2. Take notes; mark effective passages and record your impressions as you read.

3. Allow yourself time to absorb and understand what you've read.
 4. Think about the book in its broader context.
 5. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. What seems to be the author's main purpose or point?
 - b. What message(s) did the book communicate to you? Which specific parts conveyed it?
 - c. Does this appeal to a specific demographic of readers?
 - d. Does it have a personal or practical meaning or use for me?
 - e. In what context (historical, cultural, theoretical) should the book be evaluated?
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Structure

The bibliographic entry

At the top of your first page, provide the following information: Author. Title. Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication. Number of pages.

Introduction

The opening paragraph, like the concluding one, is in a position of emphasis and usually sets the tone of the paper. The focus of the introduction will reflect the assignment. If the review is descriptive, the opening will state the thesis, the purpose of the book, and how the author makes their point. In a critical review, the introduction will also include a thesis statement that argues whether or not the author has succeeded in his or her purpose.

Summary

The second part of your review should objectively describe the book's main ideas and the information it includes. You should mostly paraphrase, but a couple of good quotes might reveal the flavor of the contents. It is important to keep your ideas separate from those of the author.

Evaluation

The thesis or main points of your review should express your estimate of the book's worth and whether or not the author has made an argument worth paying attention to. This does not mean simply an opinion that the book is "good" or "bad." Instead, try to imagine what the readers of your review—for example, other students in your class—might want to know about the book. They will want to know whether or not the book will interest them, or will be useful to them, or will give them reliable information. They may also want to know if the book is likely to be useful and readable for a long time. You may want to tell readers if the book is a complete study of the subject or if it treats the subject in a fragmentary way. The book may be organized well or poorly; its argument may be well-supported and thoughtful or obvious and incomplete. Your thesis should consider these values of the book. Then, your evaluation must explain your opinion by referring to particular examples from the book itself and from other sources (i.e., course material, outside texts, theoretical debates).

