

How to Write a Book Review

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A book review is a description, critical analysis, and an evaluation on the quality, meaning, and significance of a book, not a retelling. It should focus on the book's purpose, content, and authority. A critical book review is not a book report or a summary. It is a reaction paper in which strengths and weaknesses of the material are analyzed. It should include a statement of what the author has tried to do, evaluates how well (in the opinion of the reviewer) the author has succeeded, and presents evidence to support this evaluation.

There is no right way to write a book review. Book reviews are highly personal and reflect the opinions of the reviewer. A review can be as short as 50-100 words, or as long as 1500 words, depending on the purpose of the review.

The following are standard procedures for writing book reviews; they are suggestions, not formulae that must be used.

1. Write a statement giving essential information about the book: title, author, first copyright date, type of book, general subject matter, special features (maps, color plates, etc.), price and ISBN.
2. State the author's purpose in writing the book. Sometimes authors state their purpose in the preface or the first chapter. When they do not, you may arrive at an understanding of the book's purpose by asking yourself these questions:
 - a. Why did the author write on this subject rather than on some other subject?
 - b. From what point of view is the work written?
 - c. Was the author trying to give information, to explain something technical, to convince the reader of a belief's validity by dramatizing it in action?
 - d. What is the general field or genre, and how does the book fit into it? (Use outside sources to familiarize yourself with the field, if necessary.) Knowledge of the genre means understanding the art form, and how it functions.
 - e. Who is the intended audience?
 - f. What is the author's style? Is it formal or informal? Evaluate the quality of the writing style by using some of the following standards: coherence, clarity, originality, forcefulness, correct use of technical words, conciseness, fullness of development, fluidity. Does it suit the intended audience?