

# Writing Book Reviews

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A book review tells not only what a book is about, but also how successful it is at what it is trying to do. As a reviewer, you bring together the two strands of accurate, analytical reading and strong, personal response when you indicate what the book is about and what it might mean to a reader (by explaining what it meant to you). In other words, reviewers answer not only the WHAT but the SO WHAT question about a book. Thus, in writing a review, you combine the skills of describing what is on the page, analyzing how the book tried to achieve its purpose, and expressing your own reactions.

## READING THE BOOK

As you're reading or preparing to write the review, ask yourself these questions:

1. *What are the author's viewpoint and purpose?* The viewpoint or purpose may be implied rather than stated, but often a good place to look for what the author says about his or her purpose and viewpoint is the introduction or preface.
2. *What are the author's main points?* Again, these will often be stated in the introduction.
3. *What kind of evidence does the author use to prove his or her points?*
4. *Is the evidence convincing? Why or why not?*
5. *Does the author support his or her points adequately?*
6. *What group of readers, if any, would find this book most useful?*
7. *What is the author's purpose and how successful do you think the author was in carrying out the overall purpose of the book?* Depending on your book's purpose, you should select appropriate criteria by which to judge its success. Use any criteria your instructor has given you in lecture or on your assignment sheet. Otherwise, here are some criteria to consider. For example, if an author says his or her purpose is to argue for a particular solution to a public problem, such as school reform or international relations, then the review should judge whether the author has defined the problem, identified causes, planned points of attack, provided necessary background information and offered specific solutions

## WRITING THE BOOK REVIEW

Although you should include what you feel is appropriate for explaining your assessment of a book, reviews generally include the following kinds of information:

- Most reviews start off with a heading that includes all the bibliographic information about the book. Please use Turabian/Chicago style footnoting.
- Like most pieces of writing, the review itself usually begins with an introduction that lets your readers know what the review will say. The first paragraph usually includes the author and title again, so your readers don't have to look up to find the title. You should also include a very brief overview of the contents of the book, the purpose or audience for the book, and your reaction and evaluation.

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- Reviews then generally move into a section of background information that helps place the book in context and discusses criteria for judging the book.
- Next, the review gives a summary of the main points of the book, quoting and paraphrasing key phrases from the author.
- Finally, reviewers get to the heart of their writing—their evaluation of the book. In this section, reviewers discuss a variety of issues:
  - How well the book has achieved its goal,
  - What possibilities are suggested by the book,
  - What the book has left out,
  - What specific points are not convincing, and
  - What personal experiences you've had related to the subject

It is important to carefully distinguish your views from the author's, so that you don't confuse your reader. Like other essays, book reviews usually end with a conclusion which ties together issues raised in the review and provides a concise comment on the book.

There is, of course, no set formula, but a general rule of thumb is that the first one-half to two-thirds of the review should summarize the author's main ideas and at least one-third should evaluate the book.

## ASSIGNMENT AND WRITING REQUIREMENTS:

- At least 500 words, but no more than 750 words
- 1" margins – Header w/ Name, Date of Submission, and Bibliographical Citation of the Book
- Footer w/ page number
- Times New Roman / Calibri 12 point font
- Electronic submission to [rgill@woburnpublicschools.com](mailto:rgill@woburnpublicschools.com)
- Turabian Footnote Style for all citations
- Due Date: Monday – January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009