



Writing A Book Review

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- ♣ An effective book review presents an accurate, trustworthy, critical evaluation. It makes a point so the reader makes no mistake about the critic's opinion.

Getting Started

- ♣ A good review begins with a competent, attentive reading of the work to be evaluated. You won't be reviewing the book in a vacuum, so don't read it in one. Engage as you read: How does this book fit into themes being addressed in your class? Is it reinforcing ideas? Contradicting them? Shedding new light? Read also with your teacher's guidelines for the assignment in mind.
- ♣ If you have an aversion to marking in books (or have borrowed one), Post-It notes are book-friendly, easy to use, and helpful for noting thoughts as you read—disagreements, questions, connections.
- ♣ A book review needs to include a concise summary that makes clear what kind of book it is (anthology? biography? novel?); suggests its intent and scope; and, if you know it, tells something of the author's credentials. You also might want to comment on where this book fits in with other works by the same writer or on its relationship to other works of the same genre—all in a nutshell. Above all, avoid a lengthy plot summary. Save the bulk of your review to present your qualified opinion of the book. As you were reading, what in particular struck you? Impressed you? Disturbed you? Confused you? Angered you? Increased your knowledge of or interest in the subject? Why? How?

Some Items of Concern in a Book Review

- ♣ Remember, not all of these questions are relevant to any single review. Which of them you use depends on the nature of the work and on your reaction to it. Works of fiction, for example, make different demands on the reviewer than works of non-fiction.

Fiction	Non-Fiction
<u>Theme</u>	<u>Thesis</u>
What is the author's underlying message?	What is the writer's main purpose?
Is it implicit or explicit?	Of what point does the writer hope to convince the reader?
How is it presented to the reader?	Is the writer's agenda implicit or implied?
<u>Development</u>	<u>Support</u>
How does the author use conflict to convey his/her meaning?	Does the writer offer adequate evidence (statistics, anecdotal evidence, other authorities)?
In what way are the characters presented and developed in relation to the theme? Is their use effective?	Are the facts distorted?
Is the conflict resolved within the boundaries set by the characterization?	Are any prejudices apparent?
	Are sources reliable?
	How are sources documented?
	Does the writer appear to subscribe to any critical theories in particular?
<u>Organization</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Is the story told in chronological order, in <i>media res</i> (beginning in the middle and relating events through	Do the chapter themes follow logically?



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flashback) or in another order?	
Is the ending logical or contrived?	If it is a collection of works, is the rationale of choices sound? Is it necessary to read the works in order?
Is the conflict resolved satisfactorily? Is it subtle or expected?	

Style (Fiction & Non-Fiction)

- ♣ Is it formal or informal?
- ♣ Is it appropriate to the subject and tone?
- ♣ Is the diction accessible to the average reader?
- ♣ Does it appeal to a specific audience (e.g. professionals in the field)?
- ♣ Does it aid or hinder the achievement of the author's aims?
- ♣ What seem to be the author's attitude towards the reader and towards the subject?
- ♣ Is the work in first person, third person or other?
- ♣ Would the book be more effective if told from another point of view?
- ♣ What literary devices does the author use (symbolism, allusion, figurative language)? Are the devices easily recognizable? Are they effective or obscure?

Some General Guidelines

- ♣ Avoid distorting the author's meaning by quoting out of context.
- ♣ Do not focus on minor details.
- ♣ Avoid quoting lengthy passages.
- ♣ Avoid "gusher" reviews in which you proclaim everything wonderful.
- ♣ Similarly, avoid "checklist" reviews (approach was unique, style was florid, ending was surprising, etc.)
- ♣ Above all, do not merely summarize the book. It's your review; what you think and what prompted your opinions are the main elements of the piece. Be fair to the author of the work you are reviewing and feel free to express yourself.