WRITE A BOOK REVIEW

Book reviews are thoughtful discussions about the contribution a book makes to a particular field of knowledge.

Academic book reviews are written for people who are knowledgeable in the discipline and interested in your critical evaluation of the ideas and arguments the author presents.

When reviewing a book aim to provide a sufficiently detailed ‘picture’ of the book’s main arguments and approach but also include an analysis of its readability and its success in achieving its stated aims.

A useful way to start is to ask yourself a number of questions. You could start with the following.

Questions to consider

- Who is the author?
- What else has the author written?
- How is the book positioned in your field of study?
- Who is the target audience?
- What is the book’s structure?
- What is the book’s basic approach and methodology?
- What is the main point or argument?
- What else has been written on this topic?
- What gap does the book attempt to fill?
- How does the author substantiate claims made? Is the evidence convincing?
- What is especially useful about the approach/argument/methodology/structure?
- What, if anything, could be improved?
- What was inconsistent or confusing?
- What kind of reader would you recommend this book to?

To write a critical assessment of a book, you need to be familiar with the topic and of course the contents of the book you are reviewing.

Try using these steps

1. **Skim read** the book for an idea of the central focus and the author’s aims.
2. **Read the first chapter** for information on the theoretical/conceptual framework and the **final chapter** for a summary of the conclusions.
3. **Note** any preliminary points or questions you have.
4. **Decide** what you will focus the review on.
5. **Plan the structure** of the review, ranking your points in order of importance.
6. **Identify examples** that clearly demonstrate your points.
7. **Start writing** if you haven’t already.
8. **Refer to other literature** to enhance your critique, if necessary.
9. **Remember** to include an introduction, background information, critical comment, evaluative comments and a conclusion.
10. **Provide a reference list** of the sources you have referred to.
11. **Proofread** and edit your review to ensure your spelling and grammar are correct and you have formatted the review as required.

Final check

1. Check that you have correctly listed the publication details.
2. Ensure you have described how the book fits into your field of knowledge.
3. Check that you have not been unfair to the author. Disagreement with an author’s argument or approach does not necessarily diminish the merit of the book.
A useful structure for book reviews

- Provide important bibliographic details. Provide an overview of the book. Identify the author’s aim? Identify what issues you will discuss.

- Discuss first point. Explain the author’s argument before you critique or evaluate it.

- Discuss next point. Support criticisms with evidence from the text or other research.

- Discuss gaps in author’s treatment of the topic but not aspects s/he did not intend to cover.

- Evaluate the book’s contribution to knowledge in the discipline. Provide a reference list of works you used in the review.

- Explain what the book is about and why an expert/student/general reader should read it. Point out the book’s strongest points and why it’s worthwhile reading it.

- Show your knowledge of the broader field and arguments that the book engages with.

- Tie your claims together and make a claim about the book’s effectiveness.

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