

Writing Book Reviews

A book review describes what a book is about **and** evaluates how successful it was at what it was trying to tell us. A review should bring together accurate, analytical reading and a strong personal response. In other words, reviewers answer not only the **WHAT** but also the **SO WHAT** question about a book. Thus, in writing a review, a reviewer combines the skills of **describing** what is on the page, **analyzing** how well the book achieve its purpose, and **expressing** their (the reviewers) own reactions.

Reading the Book

As you are reading or preparing to write the review, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the author's viewpoint and purpose?
- What are the author's main points?
- What kind of evidence does the author use to prove the points?
- Is the evidence convincing?
- How does this book relate to other books on the same topic?
- Does the author have the necessary expertise to write the book?
- How successful do you think the author was in carrying out the overall purpose of the book?

Sections of a Book Review

There is 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. To be sure, check with your lecturer.

Book reviews generally include the following kinds of information:

1. A **heading** that includes all the bibliographic information about the book. If an assignment sheet does not indicate the style of details to include, the following details can be used:
Title. Author. Place of publication: publisher, date of publication, number of pages.
2. An **introduction** that allows readers to know what the review will say. The first paragraph usually includes the author and title again. A *very brief* overview of the book's contents, the purpose/audience for the book, and the reviewer's reaction and evaluation should also be included.
3. **Background information** generally follows a review introduction. The background section helps place the book in context and discuss certain criteria for judging the book.
4. A **summary** of the main points of the book often follows the background information, quoting and paraphrasing key phrases from the author
5. The final part of a review consists of an **evaluation**. It is important to carefully distinguish your views from the author's, so that you don't confuse the reader. In this section, the reviewer discusses 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,
 - How the book compares to others on the subject, and
 - What specific points are not convincing.
6. A **conclusion**, like in others essays, comes at the end. The conclusion ties together issues raised in the review and provides a concise comment on the book.

Reference: UCT Upper Campus Writing Centre, 2015