

How to review a book

Book reviews describe and critically evaluate books. A book review gives a summary of the content of a book and assesses the value by focusing on the book's purpose, contents, and authority. Like other genres of academic writing, academic book reviews tend to have a standard. This may vary slightly by discipline.

The basic purpose of a book review is to convey and evaluate the following:

- a. what the book is about
- b. the expertise of the author(s)
- c. how well the book covers its topic(s) and whether it breaks new ground
- d. the author's viewpoint, methodology, or perspective
- e. the appropriateness of the evidence to the topical scope of the book
- f. the intended audience
- g. the arrangement of the book (chapters, illustrations) and the quality of the scholarly apparatus, such as notes and bibliographies.

The following framework would be a good guide for your review:

Introduction. Open with a general description of the topic and/or problem addressed by the book you are reviewing.

Summary of argument. As concisely as possible, summarize the book's argument. What exactly is the book about? Focus on the important points, claims, and information. If you can identify a thesis statement, you may quote it directly.

Adapted from:

1. Writing Academic Book Reviews by Casey Brienza (2015); <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/03/27/essay-writing-academic-book-reviews>

2. Research Guides, USC Libraries; <https://libguides.usc.edu/c.php?g=235208&p=1560694>

About the author(s). Give some basic biographical information about the author(s) or editor(s) of the book you are reviewing. Tell us who they are and what they are known for.

Summary of contents. Highlight the research methods used (if applicable) and state the range of substantive material covered in the book.

Strengths. Identify the positive aspects of the book. Think of one area in which the book does well and its insightful observations.

Weaknesses. Identify contradictions and inconsistencies in the book. Think of at least one area in which the book could be improved.

Conclusion. Summarize the main points of the book. Give your opinion about its significance, accuracy, and clarity.

Remember, you are writing a review of a book, and you will be given limited words in which to do it. While your readers may be interested in your opinion, they are, first and foremost, interested in learning about the book itself.

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