

Book Review Guidelines

Characteristics of a good review:

The review should introduce the reader to the book's content and focus on the subject of the book being reviewed.

- Include an exposition of how the book fits into the current thinking on the subject (e.g., a novel approach, an introduction, a magisterial review, the finest book on the subject ever written, etc.).
- Avoid repeating its table of contents; rather, give the reader some idea of the author's thesis and how he or she develops it.
- If the book is an edited collection of essays, or chapters by different individuals, give some idea of the overall theme and content, but be free to focus on specific chapters you consider particularly significant or worthwhile.
- Inform the reader about what is happening in the area of academic activity the book addresses; what the state of knowledge is in the subject; and how this new book adds, changes, or breaks new ground in our knowledge of this subject.

The review should be fair to the author.

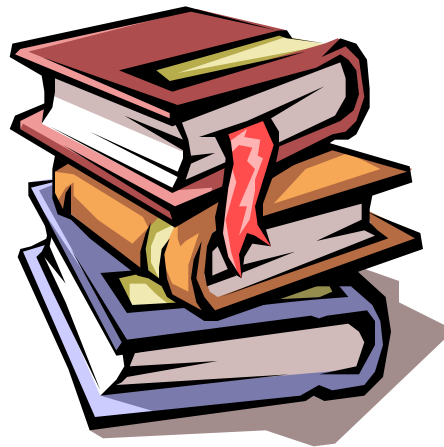
- Tell readers why the author took many months to write the book, who the intended audience is, and how the author handles his or her material.
- Convey the content of the book, not chapter by chapter so much as the entire book.
- Add flavor to the review by including pungent or revealing quotations from the book or notable facts or findings.
- Be specific. Give details. Try not to be too abstract or vague (e.g., avoid writing "interesting observations," "lots of arresting data," or "a strange view of campus design" unless you complement this with specific examples).

You should submerge your own opinions or reaction.

- Write the review about the book and its contribution to the subject, not about the reviewer's feelings on having read the book.
- Do not tell the author what book you feel he or she should have written.
- The reviewer's appraisal is valuable, but this should be quite secondary.

You should establish your authority to write the review.

- Do not point out the author's flaws, but display in a detailed and instructive way your expertise on the subject.
- Strive to make your review richly informative, even insightful.
- The finest reviews are extraordinarily understanding and moderately generous (but not uncritical), and they are enlightening little essays in their own right.
- There is no substitute for a careful reading of the book itself. Judgments about a book's usefulness and scholarly value based on a close reading of the text make the heart of a good review.



Components of the review:

- An introduction to the author(s), including the author's title and place of work, and some indication of who the author is (e.g., the renowned authority on campus finance; a bold, young architect-scholar of campus design; a frequent critic of academic administration).
- A summary of the intended purpose of the book and how it contributes to improving academic life and operations and to the discipline of college planning generally.
- A description of the way the author approaches his or her topic, the rigor of the research and scholarship, the logic of the argument, and the readability of the prose.
- A comparison with earlier or similar books in the field to place the book in the existing literature.
- An evaluation of the book's merits, usefulness, and special contributions, along with shortcomings you think are necessary to point out.