



# How to review a book

In general, most good book reviews focus mainly on a book's purpose, contents, and authority. What follows is a checklist of possible topics to include in a book review. Not all topics will be relevant to the book you are reviewing, so select the most appropriate.

## Book Review Checklist

### 1. Purpose:

- Why was the book written? What did the author hope to accomplish?

### 2. Contents:

- What type of book is it? (fiction, factual).
- Is it primarily a narrative in chronological sequence?
- Does it have a thesis or argument?
- What are the author's main ideas and how are they developed?

### 3. Book's Authority and the Author's Authority:

- What is the author's background and qualifications?
- Does the author have biases?
- Do they use reliable sources? How?
- Are the ideas in the book internally consistent?
- How well developed are the arguments?
- Are opposing ideas and arguments considered?

### 4. The General Field:

- What is it?
- How does the subject of this book fit into it?

### 5. Significance of Work in Field:

- What is its significance compared to other works by this author?
- How does the book compare to the work of other writers in this area?
- What further work needs to be done?

### 6. Author's Style:

- Is the writing style descriptive, scholarly, narrative, simple, technical, economical, wordy, logical, imaginative?
- Is the style suited to the purpose and subject of the book and the target audience?

### 7. Format:

- Is the print type appropriate and legible?
- Are there illustrations or other aids to understanding the text (images, charts, maps, etc.)?
- Is the index adequate and accurate?
- Is the bibliography superficial or thorough? Is it annotated?

### 8. Intended audience:

- Who is the intended audience?
- Does the author reach this audience and the audience's expectations?

## Organization and Writing

After you have read the book, made notes, and chosen the most important topics from the checklist above, you can begin writing. Use examples from the book to support your opinions.

**1. Introduction.** The book should be preceded by the following information: title, author's name, edition (if any), place of publication, publisher, date, number of pages, special features (maps, photos, illustrations etc), cost, ISBN number.

**2. The Beginning.** Try to begin with an interest catching item such as an anecdote from the book or a human interest item. Do not begin with "This book is ..." If one of the items on the checklist seems particularly interesting or important (either very well done or poorly done), you may wish to begin with it.

**3. Development.** Using the different topics from the checklist, describe and evaluate the book. Try to explain why the author wrote that way. Rather than simply listing a number of items from the checklist in unconnected chunks, try to relate them. You will need to use examples from the book to illustrate your opinions and ideas. It is sometimes appropriate to use short quotations but never use long quotations.

**4. Conclusion.** End the review with an assessment of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the book. If possible, relate the assessment to the opening remarks of the review.

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