

BOOK REVIEWS

The book review is a critical essay in which the writer gives an evaluation of the work in question. The evaluation should be fair and balanced, addressing the good qualities of the book as well as the shortcomings. The review is an appraisal, not a summary! A book review analyzes the contents of the book and relates them to a larger field of study that the book is part of. To write a good review, therefore, you need knowledge of the subject matter discussed in the work.

Before writing the review, read the book carefully, and find out any information you can on the author and the subject. Then, answer the following questions to help you begin writing:

Main Ideas

- What is the book about? What is the central idea?
- What is the significance of the title?
- What are the key supporting ideas? (Chapter headings and subheadings will help you with this.)
- What was the author's purpose in writing this book?

Context of Ideas

- Is the author's background, nationality, education, etc. relevant for understanding this work?
- When was the work written? Is the book as significant today as it was at the time it first appeared?
- What new concepts are introduced in this book?
- Compare the ideas in this book with the views of other writers (for example, how is his/her point of view similar or different from those you've discussed in class?)
- Who might find this information useful (specialists, the general public, young or elderly people, etc.)?
- How do the ideas in this book relate to the field of study it is a part of?

Evaluation of Ideas

- Does the author use enough strong evidence to back up the thesis and the supporting points?
- Do the author's ideas make sense to you?
- Does the author commit logical fallacies (mistakes in reasoning)?
- Which of the ideas do you feel are most significant or interesting?
- Has the author fulfilled the purpose of the book?
- Will the author's ideas influence your actions in the future?
- Even if the material seems at first unrelated to your experience, can you find general principles that would be more relevant?
- Could the ideas in this book have an influence on society? A positive or negative one?

Expression of Ideas

- Is the book readable and enjoyable, or dense and challenging? Or both?
- How well does the author express his points? Does he follow a logical and comprehensible line of thought?

You can structure your review into paragraphs based on the headings above, but the information contained in the paragraphs should be organized coherently, not point-by-point like answers to a questionnaire. You will have to find examples in the book to support whatever responses you give to the questions. Finally, you will need to revise the questions you ask and answer, depending on the information the teacher is looking for and the book you are writing about.