

Writing a Book Review

A book review is not a book report. A book report is a simple summary of a book. A book review, however, is more complicated and demanding. The most important element about a book review is that it is a commentary, not merely a summary. Reviewers report on the content and evaluate the book, discussing matters such as the author's logic, style, evidence, conclusions, and organization. Thus, in writing a review, you combine the skills of **describing** what is on the page, **analyzing** how the book tried to achieve its purpose and **expressing** your own reactions.

Steps for Writing a Book Review

1. *Introduce the book, its subject, and the author*

Most reviews start off with a heading that includes all the bibliographic information about the book. You can use the following form:

Title. Author. Place of publication: publisher, date of publication. Number of pages.

Give the subject of the book with a brief (one or two sentences) outline indicating the general topic.

Identify the author with any important information about him/her: Is he or she affiliated with a university? What is his/her area of expertise? Has he/she written any other books?

This defining information can be provided in a short paragraph.

2. *What are the author's viewpoint and purpose?*

Present the book's theme or thesis. Many times you will find the author's main purpose in writing the book in the introduction or preface.

3. *What kind of evidence does the author use to prove his or her points?*

Summarize the most important evidence the author gives to support his/her major thesis. It is not necessary to write about everything the author mentions in the book. Instead, try to highlight the major points. You may want to quote some of the author's words, but avoid long quoted passages. Most of the review should be in your own words.

4. *What is your reaction to the book?*

The heart of the book review will be your evaluation of the book. Here you will provide a judgment of the book's strengths and weaknesses. It is important that in addition to stating whether or not you liked the book, you must also discuss *why* you like or disliked it. It is not enough to say, "This book is interesting": you need to explain *why* it is interesting. To explain your reaction to the book try answering some of the questions below.

- How well has the book achieved its goal?

- Did you agree with the main theme of the book? Why or why not? / Is the book's argument convincing? If yes why, if not, why not?
- Has the author achieved the purpose for writing the book?
- Has he or she argued the thesis to your satisfaction? Why or why not?
- Has the book challenged you to think more about the subject, increased your knowledge, raised new questions? Were any previous ideas you had on this subject changed?
- Was anything left out of the book?
- What specific points are not convincing?
- What specifically did you like/dislike? Why?
- How could this book be improved?
- Would you recommend this book to others?

When possible, bring your own experience to the review. What personal experiences have you had related to the subject? Use something from your own experience—your reading, your thoughts—to explain your attitudes toward the book.

5. Conclusion

End the book review with a short conclusion that ties together issues raised in the review.

What follows is an [example of a professional book review](#) of the book, *Mobilizing Human Resources in the Arab World* written by R. Paul Shaw in the journal, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. You may want to use it as a model.