

## Suggestions for Writing Book Reviews

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The following suggestions were excerpted from several sources. There are many approaches to writing book reviews and students are encouraged to seek more than one opinion.

### ***Read the book***

Read the book at least ten days before the review is due. Read the title page first; then the table of contents, to see how the book is organized; then the bibliography, to see what sources the author used; then the preface, where the author attempts to state what she/he is doing; then, finally, the body of the book. While reading keep in mind the questions presented in this guide; note effective passages for quoting and your impressions as you read.

### ***What is the book about?***

Does the book have a central theme? Does it argue a thesis? What is the author's purpose? The author may have stated this explicitly in the preface or conclusion, or she/he may have implied it within the main part of the book. How well did the author accomplish that purpose? The statement of the content of the book should not exceed the major part of the review, nor should the book be summarized chapter by chapter.

### ***Is the book reliable?***

- ***Who is the author?***  
What are the author's qualifications for writing this book? Has she/he written any other books on a related subject? Is the book published by a reputable publisher? Is she/he a free-lance writer, or a teacher at a university? Consult Libraries' staff for assistance in finding information about the author.
- ***What did the author use for sources?***  
Are the sources of information reliable? Why or why not? Is the book based on primary or secondary sources? Does the author use the evidence with care and discrimination or read into the evidence ideas or facts that are not there?

### ***Is the material well presented?***

Is the book understandable? Is the subject matter well organized? Is it introduced in simple terms, or does the author plunge the reader into complexities which presuppose a general knowledge of the subject? Is the book to be recommended for the general student or for the specialist?

### ***How well did the author succeed in accomplishing the purpose?***

Did the book contribute to your knowledge and understanding? Would you recommend the book to another student in this course? Yes or no, and for what reasons?

## ***Prepare outline***

The review outline enables you to organize the review, to determine the central point of your review, to eliminate non-essentials or irrelevancies, and to fill in gaps or omissions. By examining your notes and eliminating those which have no relationship to your central thesis, and by organizing them into groups, several aspects of the book may emerge. After organizing your topics, write down all the major headings of the outline and fill in the subdivisions. Keep in mind that all parts of the outline should support the thesis or central point.

The opening paragraph sets the tone of the paper. Possible introductions are:

- a statement of the thesis;
- a statement of the author's purpose;
- a statement about the topicality of the work or its significance;
- a comparison of the work to others by the same author or within the same genre;
- a statement about the author.

The main body of the review should logically develop your thesis as organized by your outline. The concluding paragraph summarizes the thesis.

## ***Style***

Use your own words. If you use those of the author, show the page number in parentheses. Use a footnote if the quotation is from another source. Consult a style manual (<http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/dafoe/citing.html>) for more precise details on style.

Do not try to write your review by answering all the above-mentioned questions one by one. Some will not be relevant to your particular book.

At the top of the review, write the title of the book, name of the author, place of publication, name of publisher, date of publication, and number of pages in the book.

## ***Reading published reviews***

A scholarly journal, magazine or newspaper may have published a review of the book when it was first published. You can use these reviews as examples of how the book (or a similar book) was reviewed. To find a review consult Libraries' staff.



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