

WRITING A BOOK REVIEW

Most book reviews begin with a heading that includes bibliographic information about the book. If your assignment sheet does not indicate a particular form you should use, the following is an example:

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

Before you begin to read, consider the following:

1. **Title**- What does it suggest?
2. **Table of Contents**- Tells you how the book is organized and will help determine the author's main ideas and how they are developed—chronologically, topically, etc.
3. **Preface** (if there is one)- Gives important information on the author's purpose in writing the book and will help you determine how successful the book is.

Your **introduction** should state your central thesis and set the tone for the review. Your opening sentence should capture the reader's attention by giving a vivid description or comment about the book as a whole. This sentence could be fashioned after book blurbs found on the backs of books. Include the author's name and book title in the introduction. There should also be a very brief overview of the contents of the book, the purpose or audience for the book, and your reaction and evaluation of the book.

Next, the review gives a **summary** of the main points of the book, quoting and paraphrasing key phrases from the author as support. This should be a balance of your own commentary and thoughts on the book and quotations from passages of the book. To help you do this, take note of effective passages for quoting while you read. The following questions may be helpful to keep in mind:

1. What is the general **field** or **genre**, and how does the book fit into it? (Use outside sources to familiarize yourself with the field if necessary.)
2. From what **point of view** is the work written?
3. What is the author's **style**? Is it formal or informal? Does it suit the intended audience? If a work of fiction, what literary devices does the author use?
4. How well are the author's ideas developed? What areas are covered/not covered?
5. If the work is fiction, make notes on such elements as **character**, **plot**, and **setting**, and how they relate to the **theme** of the book. How does the author develop each of the above? What is the plot structure?
6. Finally, how well has the book achieved its goal? You may compare the book to others by this author or by others. You may also compare it with other books on the subject matter.

It's important to carefully separate or distinguish your views from the author's. In addition to discussing the questions above, you may try to find further information about the author—his/her reputation, qualifications, influences, etc. This information can help establish the author's credibility or **authority**.

Adapted by Melanie Martin using: www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/bookreview.html and http://library.queensu.ca/infoef/bookreview/write_review.htm

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