

HOW TO WRITE A BOOK REVIEW

A book review is both a description and an evaluation of a book. It should focus on the book's purpose, contents, and authority.

PREWRITING QUESTIONS:

The following questions are designed to help you generate and focus your ideas when writing a book, movie, or film review. You won't need to answer all of these questions for your paper, but many of the answers will help you discover information and focus your thinking.

What questions

- What are you reviewing? What is it about? What's the plot?
- What's the theme?
- What is the author's/director's purpose?
- What genre or classification does it fit?
- What is the tone? What is the point of view? What's the mood?

When and Where questions

- When was this done? Or when does the action take place?
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Who questions

- Who wrote it, directed it, or acted in it? What else have they done?
- Who are the main characters?
- Who's the intended audience?
- Who has said what about this? Why?

How questions

- How does it convey its main point, mood, or theme? How did the audience react to it?
- How well does it fulfill its purpose?

Evaluation questions

- Did I like this in general? Why?
- Did I agree with the main theme/purpose? Why or why not?
- What specifically did I like/dislike? Why?
- Did the author/actors/director do a good job? Why or why not?
- How could it be improved? Why would particular changes help?

After you have answered these questions, begin selecting and organizing the information that you'll include in your paper.

Scan the Book's Preliminaries

Before beginning to read, consider the following:

1. **Title** - What does it suggest?
2. **Preface** - Provides important information on the author's purpose in writing the book and will help you to determine the success of the work.
3. **Table of Contents** - Tells you how the book is organized and will aid in determining the author's main ideas and how they are developed - chronologically, topically, etc.

READ THE TEXT

Record impressions as you read and note effective passages for quoting. Keep these questions 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. Are concepts clearly defined? How well are the author's ideas developed? What areas are covered/not covered? Why? This helps to establish the book's **authority**.
5. If a work of 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 delineate his characters? How do they develop? What is the plot structure?
6. How accurate is the information in the book? Check outside sources if necessary.

CONSULT ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Try to find further information about the author - his/her reputation, qualifications, influences, etc. - any information that is relevant to the book being reviewed and that would help to establish the author's authority. Knowledge of the literary period and of critical theories can also be helpful to your review.

PREPARE AN OUTLINE

Carefully review your notes and attempt to unify your impressions into a statement that will describe the **purpose** or **thesis** of your review. Then, outline the arguments that support your thesis. Your arguments should develop the thesis in a logical manner.

WRITE THE DRAFT

Skim your notes again; then, using the outline as a **guide** and referring to notes when necessary, begin writing. Your book review should include the following:

1. **Introduction** - Try to capture the reader's attention with your opening sentence. The introduction should state your central thesis, and set the tone of the review.
2. **Development** - Develop your thesis using supporting arguments as set out in your outline. Use description, evaluation, and if possible explanation of why the author wrote as he/she did. Use quotations to illustrate important points or peculiarities.
3. **Conclusion** - If your thesis has been well argued, the conclusion should follow naturally. It can include a final assessment or simply restate your thesis. Do not introduce new material at this point.
4. **Length** — the review should not be more than two standard typed pages long (600 words).

REVISE THE DRAFT

1. Allow some time to elapse before going over your review, to gain perspective.
2. Carefully read through the text, looking for clarity and coherence.
3. Correct grammar and spelling.
4. Verify quotes for proper foot-noting.