



## Scholarly Book Review Writing Guidance

This guide is focused on writing scholarly book reviews, which will involve you in reading scholarly books critically, as one of the assignments in the above said course. This guide has been written to help you to complete this assignment. Two points are covered in this guide: introduction and steps in writing book reviews.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A book review is an analysis of a book that includes its subject, strengths and weaknesses and context. It aimed at helping readers decide whether to read the book themselves. In this connection, it should identify the central idea of the book, give the reader some indication of the author's style, approach, or premises, and then offer an overall evaluation. The reviewer should selectively tell the reader what the book covers. That it, s/he should choose select the potential parts to cover in the analysis.

The basic purpose of writing a book review is to convey and evaluate the following:

- a. what the book is about;
- b. the expertise of the author(s);
- c. how well the book covers its topic(s) and whether it breaks new ground;
- d. the author's viewpoint, methodology, or perspective;
- e. the appropriateness of the evidence to the topical scope of the book;
- f. the intended audience;
- g. the arrangement of the book (chapters, illustrations) and the quality of the scholarly apparatus, such as notes and bibliographies.

A good book review can be written through several steps. Below are the recommended steps for you to follow.

### 2. STEPS IN BOOK REVIEW WRITING

Among the works on writing book reviews, Rand's (2016) has been chosen for you because it is the most complete one. Synthesising ideas from some sources, Rand offers three clear steps which you can follow. These steps are presented below. You can also use the appraisal form as an attachment.

#### Step 1: Read the book in its entirety

- a. Before reading the chapters, please skim the foreword, preface, acknowledgement, the table of contents, list of tables (if any), list of figures (if any), references, and index
- b. Read the chapters and as you read, take notes in your own words.



- c. Ideally, it is best to read the book twice:
  - The first read through should be to familiarize yourself with the book and form initial impressions, followed by a break;
  - The second reading is to gather evidence to support your conclusions.
- d. Pay special attention to and take a note of the answers to the following:
  - What is the central question or issue the book addresses?
  - What is the book's argument or thesis?
  - How is the book organized to support this thesis? How are the chapters ordered? Chronologically? Thematically?

## Step 2: Evaluate the Book

- a. Once you have read the book, take adequate time (a few days) to evaluate it.
- b. Think critically about the work (to identify any weaknesses, yet appreciate its strengths).
- c. Evaluate the key arguments, how effectively they are presented and supported, and whether they help or fail to help readers to understand a given topic.
- d. Consider the following questions:
  - How and what does this work help us to understand about an issue?
  - What types of evidence does the author draw on to support his or her argument?
  - Does the book do what the author claims it will do?
  - Are there other types of evidence that the author ignores or fails to acknowledge?
  - What theoretical perspective does the author work from? How does this shape or affect his/her argument?
  - How is the book similar or different from other books on the topic? Why are they similar or different?
  - Are you convinced by the book? Why or why not?
- e. Appendix(ces) provide(s) a useful format of key areas that should be considered in the evaluation.

## Step 3: Write the Review

### I. *Introduction*

- a. Open with general description of topic/ problem addressed in the book you review
- b. Think of a hook (mind-catching word/phrases/sentence) to draw readers in
- c. Background
  - Identify the book and author under review with any background
  - Time period, region? Question or topic addressed?
  - About the author(s)
    - Basic biographical info about editors of book
    - Who are they, what are they known for, what are their qualifications and expertise in the subject?



- How can the work fit into wider research or career trajectory?
- d. Thesis
  - Usually toward the end, provide a succinct, clear evaluation of the book, which is the thesis of your review
    - What is the main argument of the book?
    - Your evaluation of the book such as strengths and contributions or weaknesses and shortcoming
    - Why and in what ways the work demonstrates strengths and weaknesses

## **II. Summary of the Primary Argument(s)**

- a. Concisely summarize the book's argument
- b. If there is an identifiable thesis statement, then directly quote it
- c. Identify the essential arguments and briefly summarize them
- d. Comment on the following:
  - What is the book's thesis? How is it similar or different from other researchers'?
  - Work on similar topics?
  - How is it organized? What are the major arguments?
  - What types of evidence are presented?
- e. Research methods used (if applicable)
- f. Range of material covered in the book

## **III. Evaluation/Analysis**

- a. This section should form the bulk of your review
- b. Explain and develop the evaluation made in your thesis
- c. Use examples and quotations to illustrate and prove your assessment
- d. Give examples of areas where the book did well and areas where it could be improved
- e. Weakness are likely to be something the author omitted/did not address in sufficient detail

## **IV. Conclusion**

- a. Concluding statement summarizing your review of the book
- b. What does this work contribute to the field?
- c. What limitations does it possess?
- d. Avenues for future research
- e. How does it contribute to the topic (e.g., culture, time period) studied?
- f. Explicitly identify a range of audiences that may appreciate or benefit from the book
- g. Things to Avoid in a Book Review
- h. Do not simply summarize the work.
- i. Avoid writing a research paper rather than a book review. Remember the goal is to review how the author(s)/editor(s) of a book interpreted an event/topic rather than presenting a research report on the topic yourself.



- j. Make sure to thoroughly read the book before writing your review. If you have not, it will come across in your writing.
- k. Lack of organization; like any academic paper, make sure your book review is logically structured and easy for the reader to follow.
- l. Rather than relying on personal opinions, use reasoned judgements to inform your arguments. Rather than saying a book is “bad” or “good” provide specific evidence to illustrate the book’s strengths and weaknesses.

## APPENDIX A

### Book Appraisal Worksheet (Lee et al. 2010)

#### Book Specifics

Title	
Author(s)/Editor(s)	
ISBN	
Name and Location of Publisher	
Number of pages	
Price	

#### Book Review Author Information

Name and degrees	
Affiliations (institutions, etc.)	
Declaration of conflicts of interest	

#### Book Setting & Perspective

Type of Book	
Aim/Purpose	
Intended Audience	

#### Appraisal

Topic	Appraisal Comments (Strengths/weaknesses)	Examples to substantiate appraisal comments	Praise or constructive suggestions for improvement
Author(s) background & expertise			
Book Format & Organization			
Contents Completeness Accuracy Current			
Readability/Style			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical Features</li> <li>• Table of Contents</li> <li>• Chapter layout</li> <li>• Illustrations</li> <li>• Typography</li> <li>• Tables</li> </ul>			



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Figures</li><li>• References</li><li>• Index</li><li>• Appendices</li></ul>			
Was it unique?			
Usefulness to the intended readership			
Were the goals of the book achieved?			
Comparison to competitors			
Comparison to previous editions			
Value of the book to the field of study			
Value for price			
Overall recommendation(s)			