

HOW TO WRITE A CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW

I. PREPARATION

1. Read the Preface and Introduction of the book carefully. Take note of what the author says the book is about and why it was written.
2. Examine the Table of Contents. Take note of the major divisions and how they organize and develop the subject of the book.
3. Read the book with pencil and paper in hand, taking notes as you go. If you own the book, you may want to jot down notes and questions in the margin of book.

II. FORMAT

A. Introduction - include statements about:

1. The topic/subject (a brief, but clear description)
2. Author's stated purpose, thesis, or special interest in writing this work
3. Author's stated perspective on the topic (This would include any foundational presuppositions)
4. Any acknowledged limitations or self-criticisms by the author
5. Author's stated strategy/plan in writing this work

B. Content Evaluation - may include the following:

1. A brief description of the major focus of the work and a statement of assessment as to whether you feel the subject matter was especially significant and worthy of address
2. A general overview and evaluation of the book's content
 - a. coverage of the topic - include a description of the major divisions of the book
 - b. Evaluate the development of the material in addressing the topic.
3. A general description of the book's format and physical presentation
 - a. How it was laid out?
 - b. Was the format attractive, useful, easy to follow?
 - c. What extra features were especially useful or distracting? E.g.s, charts, appendices, glossary, pictures, chapter summaries etc.
4. An evaluation of the author's ability to communicate in his/her writing
 - a. clarity of thought and expression
 - b. vocabulary
 - c. sentence structure (simple and direct, or complex and confusing)
5. A summary of noteworthy observations, finding or conclusions found in this work

C. Summary - may include:

1. A statement of whether you thought the author accomplished his stated goals and objectives (if not, why?)
2. A judgment of your general impression of this work and of its value to the field of study it addresses.
3. Any personal benefits derived from reading it

III. GUIDELINES

1. Be comprehensive in presenting the topic or subject matter, but not exhaustive. **Summary** is the key word. Don't get bogged down in minutiae.
2. When giving detailed information, let it illustrate broad general features/themes of the work. **Succinct** is the key word
3. In writing, seek to inform the person who knows virtually nothing of the topic being addressed. **Simple** is the key word.

IV. "GRADE EXPECTATIONS"

- A** All components present, well-written (little or no mechanical writing errors, (spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax), active engagement of the author and his/her ideas. Your work shows some creative thinking, or evidence of corollary study.
- B** All (or nearly all) components present, well-written (some minor mechanical errors present), clearly expressed.
- C** Some components not present, too many mechanical writing errors so as to obscure meaning and hinder comprehension.
- D/F** Significant components missing, poorly written (many mechanical writing errors - no evidence of proofreading, difficult to read and comprehend), inaccuracies and evidence of very little effort or thought.