

Writing a Book Review

William Badke

A book review is essentially an evaluation of a book, with you being the evaluator. The same kind of process can be done for a review of an article or of a website.

What follows is a common model for reviews. Your professor may have another approach, so *it's important to clarify the professor's expectations before you proceed.*

Book Report vs. Book Review

Though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different in concept. A book report is an opportunity for you to explain the content of a book (or article, etc.) in detail, with, perhaps, a brief comment at the end as to the value of the work to you. It is not evaluative for the most part.

A book review considers the message, pros, and cons of the work, as well as determining its value.

The Standard Outline of a Book Review

The Summary

You need first to familiarize your reader with the content/message of the book, summarizing what the author has to say. During this portion of the review, do not provide your own evaluation, just give a clear summary of what the author is saying. Summaries can be about one-third of the review. They offer summary without judgment. You want to replicate the author's message as carefully as possible.

Positive Comments

Begin the evaluation by indicating what you liked about the book. This should not be vague comments but be as evidence-based as possible, referring to what the author said and indicating why you agree with that. You need to have reasons for your praise that are convincing and not merely opinionated. The length of this section depends on the degree to which you have positive things to say, as opposed to negative. You may find that you liked the book only on a few points but have a lot of negatives to state. Or it could be just the opposite. But try to find at least something positive. Even if you disagree with the author's conclusions, be careful to consider whether or not the author used evidence well, included all sides of an issue, and so on. There may be positive things to say even if you find the conclusions flawed.

Negative Comments

Next you point out flaws, errors, omissions, etc. Here, be sure you are not just being guided by emotion or your own biases. You need to give reasons why you disagree with or object to the author, not just a sense that the book has offended you or challenged your beliefs. You might look at the author's methods, evidence, biases, and so on, as you provide your critique. Length of this part varies.

Summary Evaluation

Here you get to state what you ultimately thought of the book as well as offering suggestions as to what value the book might have for its audience.