



Things to Remember

A review describes what an author has written, analyzes how well the purpose has been achieved, and expresses the reviewer's reactions.

Highlight a few key points; don't try to discuss everything contained in the work.

See the *New York Times Book Review* and the *London Times Literary Supplement* for review examples.

Include only the material that has relevance for your review and use quotations sparingly.

Writing Reviews

What is a review?

A review is a critical summary of a book, a journal article, a film, a theatrical performance, a television program or episode, a restaurant, a work of art, a product, etc. While it summarizes, a review also analyzes and evaluates and, in academia, relates the work being reviewed to themes, theories, genres, or fields of study.

A critical review is not a literature review, which is (usually) the section following the introduction of an academic thesis or dissertation that investigates a body of literature to establish what is known and what is not known about the subject of the thesis.

How are reviews organized?

While there is no standard established form, many reviews begin with an **introduction** followed by a **discussion** and a **conclusion**.

- **Introduction:** Usually comprised of (1) an objective overview completely devoid of interpretation, followed by (2) a subjective account outlining the main critical aspects to be analyzed and evaluated in the discussion.
- **Discussion:** (1) An analysis that focuses on only a few key points; for example, the authors' purpose in writing the book; the author's approach to the subject (as a journalist, as an ethnographer, as a lay person); the main topic or problem discussed; important points that the author made; how these are related to one another; the evidence that the author uses in support. (2) An evaluation that explains the criteria for assessment and provides answers to such questions as: Why the reviewer found the support to be convincing, debatable, factual, one-sided, or selective; which points were well argued and which weren't; where the author conveyed personal bias; where the author supported illogical relationships or presented evidence out of context.
- **Conclusion:** States the reviewer's critical evaluation of the work as a whole, answering such questions as: Does it make a significant contribution to an existing body of knowledge? Can I justify the inclusion of this work in a course of study? Do I have any suggestions for further reading on this subject, or suggestions for further research?

Reviewing different genres

There are many genres that may be reviewed: fiction (novels, novelettes, poetry); non-fiction (primary research, documentary research, treatise, position paper, memoir, biography, textbook); non-print categories like film (drama, comedy, documentary, animation), live performances (stage plays & musicals, music performances, ballet); and, non-people categories like retail businesses, educational institutions, and commercial products. For each genre, the reviewer must consider the purposes of the work, the intended audience, the message being delivered, and the importance of the work, performance, product or institution to its particular genre.

Questions to ask yourself

Writing a good review depends to some extent on how widely the reviewer has read in a particular field. That is, there must be some basis of comparison to enable a reviewer to make valid judgments. Accordingly, student reviewers should read critically at least one other work in the field paying especial attention to these questions: What are the author's basic premises? What issues are raised, or what themes emerge? What situation (e.g. the double cohort at Ontario universities) provides the basis for the author's assertions? How informed does the author expect his readers to be? What background information is necessary for an understanding of the issues involved? Does the author do a good job of explaining factual material as well as conveying personal perspectives? Does the author clearly distinguish between fact and opinion? What has reading this work done for me or demonstrated to me? What is the most important final comment I wish to make about the work?

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