



Book Reports and Book Reviews

The Book Report: A book report concentrates on a summary of what the author has to say, and only marginally comments on the reader's opinion of what the author says and how he/she says it. It is a factual account of the book's subject matter, meant to be descriptive rather than analytical or persuasive. A good book report is well organized, gives a sense of the book as a whole, and includes publication details.

Structure of the Book Report:

► Introduction:

- Give the name of the book you have read, the author, and the publishing details.
- Tell the reader how the book is organized.
- Tell the reader the main thesis or argument of the book.

► Summary of Content:

- Take each section of the book and summarize the important points in that section, and how it relates to the overall structure and content.
- Give each section proportional weight in your summary. For example, if the book is divided into four sections of approximately equal length, you should devote the same amount of space in your summary for each section. If, however, section one is twice as long as the other three sections, you should devote more space to a discussion of this section than to the other three.

► The Conclusion:

- Tell the reader why you liked/disliked the book, referring to elements discussed in your introduction and summary sections.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Have I included all the important publication details of the book in my report?
- Have I organized my summary in a way that is easy to follow and reflects the organization of the book?
- Have I used headings to indicate major divisions within the book and within my summary?
- Have I accurately represented the point of view of the author of the book?
- Have I accurately represented the structure of the argument presented in the book?
- Have I avoided inserting my opinion of the subject matter dealt with in the book?
- Have I indicated at the end of the report whether or not I liked the book and why?

The Book Review: Although a book review, like a book report, spends some time discussing the content of the book, its main purpose is not informational, but analytic and persuasive. The writer, in analysing the content, format, argument, and context within which the book was written, argues that the book is worth reading or not.

Preparing to Write the Book Review: Before you write the book review, but after you have read the book, you should make notes on the following areas:

► The Author:

- Background and qualifications
- Writing style
- Use of sources (see Bibliography & Table of Charts & Figures)
- His/her purpose in writing the book

► The Book Format:

- Table of Contents
- Section & Chapter Titles

- Index
- Introduction (often tells the format, purpose, and intended audience)

► The Content:

- Introduction/Conclusion
- Preface
- Chapter summaries
- Tables, Graphs, Figures, etc.

Structure of the Book Review:

► Introduction:

- A general description of the book: title, author, subject, and format. Here you can include details about who the author is and where he/she stands in this field of inquiry. You can also link the title to the subject to show how the title explains the subject matter.
- A brief summary of the purpose of the book and its general argument or theme. Include a statement about for whom the book is intended.
- Your thesis about the book: is it a suitable/appropriate piece of writing about the problem for the audience it has identified?

► Summary of the Content:

- This can be done in the same way that it is done for the simple book report. Do not spend too much time or paper on this section, as the analysis of content is more important than a simple summary.

► Analysis of Text:

- What is the writer's style: simple/technical; persuasive/logical?
- How well does the organizational method (comparison/contrast; cause/effect; analogy; persuasion through example) develop the argument or theme of the book? Give examples to support your analysis.

- What evidence does the book present to support the argument? Give examples: maps, charts, essays by experts, quotations, newspaper clippings.
- How convincing is this evidence? Select pieces of evidence that are weak, or strong, and explain why they are such.
- How complete is the argument?
- Are there facts and evidence that the author has neglected to consider? Here you may use a comparable book on the same topic to illustrate what has been omitted.

► Evaluation of the Text:

- Give a brief summary of all the weakness and strengths you have found in the book. Does it do what it set out to do?
- Evaluate the book's overall usefulness to the audience it is intended for.
- Note why you liked/disliked the book.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Does my introduction clearly set out who the author is, what the book is about, and what I think about the value of the book?
- Have I clearly presented all the facts about the book: title, author, publication details, and content summary?
- Is my review well organized with an easily identifiable structure?
- Have I represented the book's organizational structure and argument fairly and accurately?
- Have I presented evidence from the book to back up statements I have made about the author, his/her purpose, and the structure, research and argument of the book?
- Have I presented a balanced argument about the value of the book for its audience? (Harsh judgements are difficult to prove and show academic intolerance.)

Sources: Buckley, Joanne. "Keeping Your Head: Kinds of Essay Writing" *Fit to Print*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace. 1995: 93-96. Northey, Margaret. *Making Sense*. 3re ed. Toronto: Oxford. 1993: 33-36. Read, Jennifer. *Critical Book Reviews: Workshop Notes*. Jan. 1997. Thomson, Ashley. *How to Review a Book*. Laurentian University Library. 1975.