A Guide to Writing Book Reviews

I. Introduction

A book review is more than a mere summary of the book; it is a critical evaluation and analysis of the book. A brief summary is a part of the review, but the critical analysis is the crucial element.

II. Form

The length of the review should be about 3 to 4 pages (1000 words), typed, double-spaced with one-inch margins on both sides, top, and bottom. The paragraphs should be left justified with the first line indented 4 or 5 spaces; this will leave the right side of the paragraphs ragged. There should not be an extra space or line between paragraphs. The content below should be organized in the body of the essay with an orienting introduction and a summarizing conclusion.

The final draft should be as error free as possible. Spelling and grammar are important to academic writing. Good writing is re-writing. If you wait to the last day to write a paper, it will not be well written. As you edit your preliminary drafts, read them out loud.

III. Content

A good review should address the following points (NOT, however, in outline form under the headings below. Use standard college essay form.):

A. Brief Statement about the Author: Who is the author? What training, experience, or position qualifies them to write this book? Are they biased? How so? What is their frame of reference (ethnicity, background, education, politics, etc)?

B. Scope of the Work: Both topically, chronologically and argumentation. What period does it cover? What topics and and ideas are presented? Is it organized logically? What is the pattern of organization? Is it consistent? Is it readable and understandable?

C. Emphasis and Contribution of the Work: What aspect of the material does the author consider most important? Is it economic, social, political, intellectual, religious, or a combination? What is the primary reason for writing the book? What is the thesis of the work, the main point? Why did the author feel the need to write about the subject? Did the author develop any new ideas, or present new material?

D. Point of View or Bias: Does the author try to deal with the subject impartially, or is he/she prejudiced one way or another? Does the author show a special sympathy or antagonism toward any particular individual, class, or group? Does this sympathy or subjectivity enhance or detract from the argument or story. Does the author reveal his/her own cultural, economic, or political prejudices? If so, how does this affect the book.

E. Sources Used: How and when did the author do the research for the book? What type of research did the author do? What types of sources were used? Do the type and nature of the sources affect the character of the work? How? Were important sources overlooked or not used? (Much of this information can be found in the notes, bibliography, preface and foreword.)

F. Recommendations: Did you, the reviewer, find the book well-researched, organized, and written? Did you enjoy reading it? Explain why or why not. Do you recommend the book to others? Who or what type of reader would benefit from reading the book, or from owning it?