

King's College

D. Leonard Corgan Library
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711

STUDY GUIDE # 18

HOW TO REVIEW A BOOK*

The guidelines below are especially appropriate for reviewing **non-fiction**. If you are interested in locating published book reviews, see **Study Guide #8, Finding Book Reviews**.

The following checklist offers ideas for possible topics to address in a review. No review should include all--or even many--of these topics. **As a general rule, topics 2, 4 and 5 are the primary focus of most book reviews.** Beyond that, one's selection of topics may be suggested by the book itself (e.g. if there is nothing remarkable about its style or format, leave remarks on these subjects out). Selection may also be affected by certain limitations of the reviewer (e.g. length, point of view, degree of sophistication).

CONTENTS OF THE REVIEW

1. The General Field

What is it? How does the subject of the book fit into it?

2. The Purpose

Why was the book written? What did the author hope to accomplish?

3. The Title

Derivation; meaning; suggestiveness; fitness; adequacy; ambiguity...

4. The Contents

What type of book is it? Consider the following examples:

Description – (e.g. pictorial, mood-creating, impression-giving)

Narrative – (e.g. chronological; relating time to characters or events)

Exposition – (e.g. What is the thesis or argument? What are the author's main ideas and how are they developed?)

5. The Authority

Author's background, qualifications and perspective

Ideas covered/not covered

Strength and consistency of argument

Inclusion of relevant secondary materials and sound documentation

6. The Writing Style and Book Format

Writing (e.g. simple/technical; clear/turgid)

Aids to understanding and use (e.g. charts, maps, index, bibliography)

7. The Significance of the Work

Compared to other works by the author

Compared to other works in the field

ORGANIZATION AND WRITING

Once you have read the book and have considered the preceding checklist, you are ready to write the review.

Preliminary: Any book review should be preceded by the following information: Author's name; title; edition; place of publication; publisher; date; paging.

The Beginning

An effective opening will catch the reader's attention immediately. **Do not begin with something dull such as "This book is..."** Instead try:

- Writing a brief anecdote or some human interest item connected with the book or its author
- Taking as a point of departure one of the more important items on the checklist (e.g. the significance of the book in the field)
- Opening with a statement about projected treatment of the book (e.g., "Certain features of this monograph make it worth reading...but these strengths are outweighed by..."

Development

A good review will involve description, evaluation, and wherever possible, an explanation of why the author wrote as he did. This means it will be necessary to relate different parts of the checklist to one another (e.g. how the author's bias affected his selection and use of sources).

In the sense that the review involves relationships, it is like a little essay. It differs from an essay, however, in that **it never includes:** chapters or other divisions; long quotations from the book used to illustrate a point; footnotes. (If quoting from the book, put the page number, surrounded by parentheses, in the review immediately after the quote). Finally, never append to a review a bibliography of works consulted.

Conclusion

Do not, as a general rule, trail off with comments about minor matters, e.g. typographical errors. Instead try to end the review with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the book. If possible, relate the assessment to the opening remarks of the review so that the results are a neat little package.

*Adapted from materials developed by the URIS Undergraduate Library, Cornell University.

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