

Tips for Writing Book Reviews

Reading is essential for any writing. Read lots of book reviews, and particularly study those in the publication for which you are writing.

A good review not only characterizes the book and its author, but conveys something of the personality of the reviewer. But don't overdo this!

Some specific questions to ask:

Overall impression

- Does it live up to any claims made in the Preface, Introduction or jacket blurb?
- Does it contain new material or ideas?
- Does the title give a fair impression of the content?
- Does the design and layout enhance the content, or detract from it?
- Is it clear what audience it is aimed at?

Text

- Is it well written (good writing is unobtrusive, bad writing annoys you with awkwardness, repetition etc.)?
- Has it been well edited and proof-read? The best writing can be let down by sloppy editing.
- Is it clearly laid out, and visually attractive, not too cramped, with sensible margins etc?
- Is there any critical apparatus such as footnotes, endnotes, appendices, bibliography, index or glossary, and are these well-presented and user-friendly? (A poor index is worse than useless.)

Images

- Are they relevant and informative?
- Are they clear, well reproduced and of an appropriate size?
- Are they fully and adequately explained in the captions, and referred to by number in the text?
- Are there credits to photographer or illustrator, and reference to any copyright-holder?

Summary

- Has the author done a good job?
- Have the publishers done a good job?
- Is it value for money?
- Do you recommend it, and, if so, to whom?