WRITING AN BOOK REVIEW FOR AN ACADEMIC JOURNAL

Step 1: Read the book in it’s entirety
- Don’t just read the chapters of the book, but also look at the following: foreword, preface, acknowledgements, references, index etc.
- As you read, take notes in your own words
- Note the following:
  - What is the central question or issue the book addresses?
  - What is the book’s argument or thesis?
  - How is the book organized to support this thesis? How are the chapters ordered? Chronologically? Thematically?
- Ideally, it is best to read the book twice. The first read through should be to familiarize yourself with the book and form initial impressions, followed by a break and a second reading to gather evidence to support your conclusions.

Step 2: Evaluate the Book
- Once you have read the work, take a few days to evaluate it
- Think critically about the work
- Evaluate the key arguments, how effectively they were presented and supported, and if they help or fail to help readers to understand a given topic
- Consider the following questions
  - How and what does this work help us to understand about a time period or issue?
  - What types of evidence does the author draw on to support his or her argument?
  - Does the book do what the author claims it will do?
  - Are there other types of evidence that the author fails to acknowledge or ignores?
  - What theoretical perspective does the author work from? How does this shape of affect his/her argument?
  - How is the book similar or different from other books on the topic? Why are they similar or different?
  - Are you convinced by the book? Why or why not?
- Appendix A provides a useful format of key areas that should be considered in the evaluation

Step 3: Write the Review
I. Introduction
- Open with general description of topic/problem addressed in the work
- Think of a hook to draw readers in
- Background
  - Identify the book and author under review with any background
  - Time period, region? Question or topic addressed?
  - About the author(s)
    - Basic biographical info about editors of book
    - Who are they, what are they known for, what are their qualifications and expertise in the subject
  - How can the work fit into wider research or career trajectory?
• Thesis
  o Usually toward the end, provide a succinct, clear evaluation of the book, which is the thesis of your review
    ▪ What is the main argument of the book
    ▪ Your evaluation of the book such as strengths and contributions or weaknesses and shortcoming
    ▪ Why and in what ways the work demonstrates strengths and weaknesses

II. Summary of the Primary Argument(s)
• Concisely summarize the book’s argument
• If there is an identifiable thesis statement, then directly quote it
• Identify the essential arguments and briefly summarize them
• Comment on the following:
  o What is the book’s thesis? How is it similar or different from other researchers’ work on similar topics?
  o How is it organized? What are the major arguments?
  o What types of evidence are presented?
• Research methods used (if applicable)
• Range of material covered in the book

III. Evaluation/Analysis
• This section should form the bulk of your review
• Explain and develop the evaluation made in your thesis
• Use examples and quotations to illustrate and prove your assessment
• Give examples of areas where the book did well and areas where it could be improved
• Weakness are likely to be something the author omitted/did not address in sufficient detail

IV. Conclusion
• Concluding statement summarizing your review of the book
• What does this work contribute to the field
• What limitations does it possess
• Avenues for future research
• How does it contribute to topic (e.g., culture, time period) studied
• Explicitly identify a range of audiences that may appreciate or benefit from the book

Things to Avoid in a Book Review
• Do not simply summarize the work.
• Avoid writing a research paper rather than a book review. Remember the goal is to review how the author(s)/editor(s) of a book interpreted an event/topic rather than presenting a research report on the topic yourself.
• Make sure to thoroughly read the book before writing your review. If you have not, it will come across in your writing.
• Lack of organization; like any academic paper, make sure your book review is logically structured and easy for the reader to follow.
• Rather than relying on personal opinions, use reasoned judgements to inform your arguments. Rather than saying a book is “bad” or “good” provide specific evidence to illustrate the book’s strengths and weaknesses.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Book Appraisal Worksheet (Lee et al. 2010)

Book Specifics:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)/Editor(s)</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
<th>Name and Location of Publisher</th>
<th>Number of pages</th>
<th>Price</th>
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Book Review Author Information
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<th>Name and degrees</th>
<th>Affiliations (institutions, etc.)</th>
<th>Declaration of conflicts of interest</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Book Setting & Perspective
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<th>Type of Book</th>
<th>Aim/Purpose</th>
<th>Intended Audience</th>
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</table>

Appraisal

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Appraisal Comments (Strengths/weaknesses)</th>
<th>Examples to substantiate appraisal comments</th>
<th>Praise or constructive suggestions for improvement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s) background &amp; expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Format &amp; Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contents Completeness Accuracy Current</td>
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<td>Readability/Style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Appraisal Comments (Strengths/weaknesses)</td>
<td>Examples to substantiate appraisal comments</td>
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<td>Index</td>
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<td>Appendices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was it unique?</td>
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<td>Usefulness to the intended readership</td>
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<td>Were the goals of the book achieved?</td>
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<td>Comparison to competitors</td>
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<td>Comparison to previous editions</td>
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<td>Overall recommendation(s)</td>
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