

Critical Book Review



The purpose of a book review is to provide the reader with a critical assessment of what the author of a book is arguing. A critical book review should spend very little time summarizing the 'story', but should instead focus on the strength of the author's argument.

1. **Introduction** - The length of the introduction should be from 1/2 to 3/4 of a page. The introduction should touch on the following:
 - a) introduce the reader to the book and the author
 - b) set the book in historical context. (when was the book written and to what events/ideas was the author reacting)
 - c) what was the author's purpose for writing the book? For whom is the author writing?
 - d) Your thesis which should contain your judgment regarding the success/failure of the book/author

2. **Book Summary** - The length of the summary should be approximately one page. The summary should include the following
 - a) What is the book about? What topic does it deal with and how is this topic limited? What "facts" are presented and what "facts" are omitted?
 - b) What is the thesis of the book? Is the thesis implied or is it clearly stated?
 - c) Is the nature of the argument chronological, topical, or comparative?
 - d) What are the main conclusions that the author reaches?
 - e) What historical method does the author use? What types of sources does the author use? Are the sources varied?

3. **Critical Evaluation - THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE REVIEW.** This section should be 3 pages in length. In this section you should deal with the strengths and weaknesses in the author's argument. Your judgments need to be supported by evidence used as examples in the book itself. The critical evaluation should keep the following in mind:
 - a) What kind of assumptions does the author make? Are they valid?
 - b) What kind of evidence is used to support the argument? Is it adequate?
 - c) Does the author over-generalize from the evidence presented?
 - d) Does the author reveal an obvious/implicit bias?
 - e) Is the book well written?
 - f) Is the book well detailed/too detailed?
 - g) Could the book have been made more convincing? How?
 - h) Does the book leave issues that require further exploration?
 - i) Does the book make a substantial contribution to our understanding of.....?
 - j) Would you recommend it? WHY?

4. **Conclusion** - this section should be approximately 1/2 page briefly summarize your thesis and major points.