

## A Sample Book Review

(This is a fictional review of a work that does not exist--it is intended to show you how a review should be written, with some general guidelines to help you write your own review well.)

Writer, Whattagreat. *How to Write Great Book Reviews: An Introduction for Undergraduates*. New York: Outstanding Publications, Inc., 1991. Pp. 237.

Most students have had little experience writing "formal" academic papers. When confronted with an assignment to write a book review, they often do not know what to do. Even general guidelines do not provide enough information for many undergraduates. To help students deal with this problem, Whattagreat Writer has written an excellent practical guide to writing book reviews. *How to Write Great Book Reviews: An Introduction for Undergraduates* will undoubtedly become the standard work on this subject.

Writer's work is a well organized, carefully prepared volume, which covers all conceivable aspects of writing book reviews. In addition to the excellent text, there are numerous illustrations, showing proper page layout, sample title pages, and practical aspects of preparing book reviews. The index is thorough, without being too detailed to use easily. The text is also well written, with Writer's subtle sense of humor brightening what might otherwise be considered a dull subject.

To assist students, Writer has also included a list of basic elements to include, as well as common errors to avoid. Several of the most important are:

1. Book titles are italicized. (You may also underline the title instead of using italics, but the latter are preferred.) Use quotation marks only if they appear in the title. (The italics imply that it is a book title. Thus you do not need to use the words "the book" or "in the book" in reference to the work you are reviewing. Writer also reminds students that a "novel" is a work of fiction; books you select for Dr. Slind's classes should monographs, and thus nonfiction.)

2. Use a title page, which includes your name, the name of the book you are reviewing (and the author), and the course and section numbers. (Writer notes that when preparing reviews for Dr. Slind, you do not need to use folders; he particularly dislikes plastic ones. Simply staple your title page to the review.)
3. List bibliographic information at the top of the first page of the review. (Your title page should only list the author and title; begin the first page of the review with a complete listing, including publication information.)
4. Avoid first person. Since you are writing the review, it is not necessary for you to state "I think," or "I believe." If it is your review, the opinions are supposed to be your own. Writer suggests that instead of using "I," a more appropriate form to use would be "this reviewer." But even that form can usually be avoided.
5. Avoid contractions. For example, instead of "don't," use "do not." (Here Writer's subtle humor may go unnoticed, as he cleverly suggests, "Don't use contractions." [p. 47].)
6. The paper should be typed, and reproduced with a clear, legible print.
7. Assume that the reader knows nothing about the class for which the review is being written. It should be written so that an "outside observer" can understand it without having any previous contact with the course. (This should be done for any academic assignment, not just book reviews.)
8. Be sure that your writing style fits the nature of the assignment. For example, a "formal" academic assignment calls for a different style than a narrative account of your summer vacation. Remember that most attempts to include humor in an academic paper are inappropriate, and simply make the writer seem immature.
9. Be consistent with tenses. In general, use present tense when you are dealing with the author and the book itself, and past tense when you discuss what the author is describing.

10. Use the author's full name the first time you refer to it in the body of your paper. If possible, include some information about the author, since that may reveal possible reasons for the author's particular perspectives or biases.

11. If you use quotations longer than 3 or 4 lines, use a "block quotation," which is single spaced, and indented. Unlike regular quotes, block quotations do not have quotation marks at the beginning and end. Whenever you quote from the book you are reviewing, remember to indicate the page number (in parentheses at the end of the quotation--as in number 5 above).

12. Avoid 1-sentence paragraphs. Also, your paragraphs should generally be no longer than three quarters of a page.

Because this is a practical guide for students, rather than the result of research in historical documents, Writer does not include footnotes. However, his extensive bibliography provides a thorough guide to other reference works, which students may find useful in preparing other written assignments.

Writer's only weakness is his tendency to provide too many examples for each subject. By limiting his selection of examples to one or two of the most important possibilities for each subject, his work would have been reduced in size, and consequently easier for students to use. Because of the excellent index, however, most students will have little difficulty using this work to improve the quality of their book reviews.