

Book Review Outline

[This web page is adapted from a class handout written for his classes by Professor John Flynn]

1. Give the full title, author's name, and publication data. Set this apart from the body of the review.

2. Give some information about the author which would aid in the understanding of the nature of the book. Is this his first book on the topic? Is the author renowned? Does he have special training or experience in this field? What does the publication data tell you about the book and its author? Is the book up to date? What is the author's nationality? You can get most of this information from the Who's Who, or from published reviews, or from the book itself. Limit this section to two or three sentences.

3. State the subject of the book. Your description of the subject should take the reader from where he presumably stands in point of knowledge and brings him to the book under review. Use two or three sentences at most. Be sure to distinguish this from the author's objective, which you will deal with next.

4. What is the author's objective? You succinctly answer this question by stating the thesis or particular argument about the subject the author is propounding. As you do so you may very well need to explain how the author presents his material. In other words, how is the book organized? Topically? Chronologically? Use three to five sentences.

5. Summarize the main points or conclusions the author makes to prove his thesis. Use several paragraphs. Your summary should contain enough detail to be informative and do justice to the author. But, there is no need to recopy the whole book.

6. How well did the author prove his thesis? Evaluate this on the basis of completeness, factual grounding or documentation, the logic of his conclusions and arguments, and style. See reviews published in scholarly journals, major newspapers and periodicals. Evaluate the most detailed reviews: Do you agree or disagree with their conclusions? Would you qualify their comments in any way or amplify them? Explain your answers in detail.

7. Explain the significance of this book. In other words, what contribution does this book make to the study of its subject? Exactly what makes the book significant? Its approach? Its conclusions or discoveries? The author's unique perspective? How do the scholars rate this book? What did they say about its significance? Do you agree with them? Why? Why not? How does the knowledge contained in this book compare with that offered in a textbook or an encyclopedia?

Answer the questions listed above as directly as possible. Refer to these questions as you read the book and as you read the reviews. Note down your thoughts as they come to you, and then put them together in a coherent and effective review essay. Be sure to take care to express yourself clearly, observing academic standards for neatness, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style. Proofread your work. Serious shortcomings in style will render your essay unintelligible and presumably lower your grade.