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Mechanics of Writing: Book Review

Ram Naresh Patel

Research Scholar
University of Lucknow
Lucknow (U.P.)

Writing is a skill whether it's a book, a text, a small notice or an application. Each type of writing has a certain set of rules governed with it to write it in a suitable and presentable manner. Among various types of writings, 'book review' plays a very vital role to all concerned. It not only helps the new readers in selection of the particular book but helps in analyzing and understanding the book also. The present paper focuses on the skill of 'book review' writing, its role, importance, value and various techniques involved in writing the book review. It is not specific to a particular fields or genre. It is applicable to all kinds of text especially concerned to all kinds of writing in the form of a book. This paper will also help to all new writers in writing a book review in a systematic manner.

A 'book review' is a description, critical analysis, and an evaluation on the quality, meaning, standard and significance of a book in reader's purely own words. It is not a book report or summary or a retelling the story of book but a form of literary criticism in which a book is analyzed based on its content, style and merit and last it can sometimes relate to other book having similar features. It focuses on the book's purpose, content and authority. Books can be reviewed for magazines, news papers and periodicals. One can start writing review with a statement of what the author has tried to do; it evaluates how well the author has succeeded and presents evidence to support this evaluation. A book review not only tells what a book is about but also how successful it is at what it is trying to do.

While writing a review, one must answer not only the WHAT but the SO WHAT also. Most of the enthusiastic readers are on the lookout for quality material to study and constantly have to look at book review online. The advantages of a book review can be understood the following way.

The first and the most obvious advantage of a book review is the fact that it helps visitors to determine whether or not to read the book. People can also decide whether to buy the book or even lent it through the collection based on the opinions of other visitors. It is just a personal kind of opinion, through which readers can discover high quality content material. The second advantage of book review is that, it really boosts the audience for that writing and the particular author. If any book has positive evaluation, more people are likely to see it clearly. For marketing reason, companies can have their publications created up and rely on them. They possess a viable marketing platform by interesting customers via reading. An unfavorable review can also possess the same impact. Many times, when a book is panned by other readers, people read it to observe what the hassle is about. One can publish one's negative review but not to exclude the major parts of positive elements because it affects to other new readers. So being a justified person, one should attempt to write a book review. It's not to take personal kind of revenge by putting only negative elements. The third advantage of book review is that when we study, we do not grasp usually all the information, the writer is trying to share. Writing a book review assists us to analyze and understand the material much better. A book review not only

helps others by improving one's personal understanding of the book but it also helps him/her to write his own material.

These three factors symbolize the importance of book reviews. We should not choose just any kind of book. Discover publications that are relevant and that individuals could be prepared to read.

There is no right way of writing a book review. Book reviews reflect the personal opinions of the reviewer. A book review can be as short as fifty to hundred words or as long as one thousand and five hundred words. It's better to limit the writing within hundred to fifteen hundred words (maximum). All this depends on the purpose of the review. In the following sections, the standard procedures for writing book review are discussed. These procedures are merely suggestions, not formulae that must be used.

Initially, one should write a statement giving essential information about the book—like title and the writer of the book, first copyright date, type of the book (genre), the general subject matter of the book, special feature of the book, price and ISBN.

Secondly, one should mention the purpose of the author in writing the book. Generally authors state their purpose in the preface or the first chapter. But when they do not, one may find the purpose of the book by asking oneself these questions:

- a. Why did the author not choose any other subject except it?
- b. What point of view is used in the book?
- c. Was the writer trying to give information, to explain something technical or to convince the reader to his own belief?
- d. What is the general field or the genre and how does the book fit in to it?
- e. Who is the intended audience?
- f. What is the style of the author? Does his style formal or informal?
- g. Scan the table of contents, it can help one to understand how the book is organized and will aid in determining the author's main ideas and how they are developed—chronically, topically, etc.
- h. How does a book affect one? Were there previous ideas on that particular subject, are changed, abandoned, or reinforced. How the book is related to one's agenda and to one's personal experiences which are related to the subject?

After that, theme and thesis of the book can be discussed. The theme of the book cannot be usually expressed in the title or in a complete sentence. It expresses a specific phase of the general subject matter. And the thesis is an author's generalization about the theme, the author's belief about the facts, the book's philosophical conclusion, or the proposition, the author means to prove. It should be expressed without metaphor or other figurative language, in one declarative sentence.

One should state the method of the development with the way, the author supports the thesis. Doing this one can illustrate his remarks with specific reference and quotation. In general, authors tend to use the following methods, exclusive or in combination:
(1) **Description:** Description presents background and setting. The author presents word-picture of scenes and events by giving specific details that appeal to the five senses, or to the

reader's imagination.

(2) **Narration:** The author recounts the story of a series of events, usually presented in chronological order. Narration tells what has happened. Its primary purpose is to tell a story.

(3) **Exposition:** Exposition presents the facts about a subject or an issue as clearly and impartially as possible. It is used to explain and analyze a subject or to clarify an idea.

(4) **Argument:** Its primary purpose is to convince the reader to believe some issues and to act on that belief.

Book review evaluates the book for accuracy, objectivity, importance, thoroughness and usefulness to its intended audience. Author's main arguments may be wrong then one must evaluate them carefully while responding to the author's opinion. One must mention what one agrees or disagrees with giving reasons. All the conclusions, whether or not derived logically from the evidence, must be mentioned. Book reviews consider what problems or issues are omitted or left unsolved by the author, and at which point author is not convincing.

As a reviewer, one must try to find further information about the author such as reputation, qualification, influences, biographical, etc. with those that are relevant of the book being reviewed and that would help to establish the author's authority. After all one must see, is there any connection between author's philosophy, his experiences and the reviewed book?

If possible or relevant, make note of the book's format-layout, binding typography etc. After that check the whole material—Did one place everything at the right place? Is the index accurate? One must recheck every endnote and footnote lest he should leave them. Do they provide important additional information? Do they explain or extend points made in the body of the text? Check, is there any bibliography provided by the author? What kind of sources has the author used in bibliography? Are they primary or secondary? How does the writer make use of them? Make note of important omission.

One should briefly summarize, analyze, and comment on the book's content. One should mention his general conclusions but one should pay his attention especially on the concluding chapters of the text. One should point out the principal topic, main points and conclusion summarized by the author. One must use specific references and quotations to support his statements. One should make sure that his thesis is well argued or not if it is well argued, the conclusion should follow naturally. He should include a final assessment or simply restate his thesis. Reference of new material may be harmful at this point.

In literature, there are different types of genre such as fiction, prose, poetry, biography etc. While reviewing specific genre one must follow different steps and procedures. Every genre consist different forms and different elements so how are they simply reviewed within the criteria of same process. Critiquing poems is a very challenging but an interesting job. It is difficult because reviewing poems is a personal act and reviews vary greatly as far as the reviewer changes. Whether one is reviewing a book of poetry for a school assignment or local newspaper, does not be panic. As, reading a book improve one opinion, in the same way poetry also form new opinion in one. Poetry gives one pleasure as well as pain, but no one wants to read a badly written poem and in the same way a badly written review. However, while reviewing poetry, one must keep in his mind a few simple rules. One should:

i. Read the poetry book straight through to gauge his initial point of view. Read it slowly with understanding and absorb the words and note down every minor or special thought come to

mind.

- j. Specify, is this a work of power, originally or individually?
- k. Evaluate, what kind of poetry is under review? Is this epic, lyric, elegy, etc?
- l. Write a short introduction that explain the poetry book's title, author's name, publisher, copyright date, type of book, general or special subject matter, price and ISBN. Include a brief biography about the poet, focusing on his life as a writer.
- m. Write a paragraph on the style and practical literary devices used by the author including rhyme, rhythm, figure of speech, imagery, etc. Reread the book and try to find out several examples that one feels important to prove one's point of view about the theme. One can quote a few lines from the various poems to emphasize one's point. Interrelate it with other poems if possible.
- n. Write one or more paragraphs including one's feelings on the book of poetry. One can critique the book but not rudely. One should not forget to cite specific examples when stating a negative point. Leave general thoughts but examine specific verses and lines. One must be honest without insulting the author.

A written review is the exposition of the positive and negative aspects of the particular book. One's comments are subjective and open to criticism itself, so one needs to be as thorough and thoughtful as possible while writing.

Writing a review of a biography is very challenging because one's evaluation can reflect not only on the book but also on the subject of the biography itself. While reviewing a biography one should keep in mind these simple steps:

- A. Embarking on one's own review, read professional biography reviews such as—News paper book review sections or in *Publishers' Weekly* magazine. One should not read the book which one is intending, but rather read reviews of other biographies.
- B. Specify the subject matter of the biography.
- C. Take notes while reading the biography and note down your impression of the book at the end of each chapter. Note down the passages seen particularly good or bad.
- D. Write about the impression, given by the author about the subject of the biography. One can ask these questions to oneself:
 - (a) Did one come away with a deeper understanding of the subject?
 - (b) Was the writing superficial?
 - (c) What are unique facts one discovered by reading the book?
 - (d) Keep in mind that one is reviewing the biography not the subject. Always focus those points through which the author illuminated his actions.
 - (e) Proofread review. Make sure, one stay within the word count limit, if it is specified.

While writing review of a novel one can follow these pre-steps:

- Read the book. Seems obvious, but reading is key to a good review; understand clearly whatever one is reading.
- As one read, gather information and make note of different things about the work as—What is the genre of the work? Who is the narrator; is it in first person or third person? What is the age of the work, when it was written? What do you feel about the work?
- From what sources are the characters taken? Are they flat or three-dimensional?
- Writer's attitude towards the characters.

- Note down some special points of the story. What are the major themes of the work? How are they executed? Is the theme original, familiar, new or traditional? Is the theme didactic, psychological, social, entertaining, escapist, etc in purpose or intent?

Now, one can start writing with these steps:

- Start writing with an introduction, a paragraph that describes one's first impression of the work, or an interesting anecdote that one had experienced through the book, or one can briefly state the author, title, publisher and any other information about the book.

- In the first section, one can give a brief history of the author with some relevant data like previous works, awards, studies etc.

- In the second section, outline the plot of the book. How are the various elements of plot handled? What are the elements of mystery and suspense? Is there a sub-plot, how is it related to the main plot?

- What are the "intellectual" (simplicity, charity etc.), "aesthetic" and "emotional" qualities of writing (humor, satire, wit etc.)?

- Write a paragraph explaining one's own opinion of the way the book was written.

- Use the final paragraph as summary of the whole review. Give one's personal opinion of the book (whether one enjoyed or not) and finish by recommending the book according to personal opinion. State, whom is the book perfect for?

In a review of a historical book, one needs to do more than simply lay out the contents or plot line of a book. One must focus one's review on historical narrative or contents but on the historical argument being made and how effectively the author has supported this argument with historical evidence.

Before reading the book, one should find out the prior works of the author and how is that particular book concerned with previous works. As one reads, note down about the following points:

- Write a few sentences about the approach of the author. Note down the focus of the author whether on gender, class, race, politics, culture, labor, law or something else.

- Summarize the author's subject and argument in a few sentences describe the time period, major events, geographical scope and group and groups of people who are being investigated in the book. State the period (from & to) covered in the book, the arguments that the author makes and attempts to support with evidence. Sometimes there is a series of supporting arguments to support a broad argument. One can move ahead keeping following points in mind.

- Write about the structure of the book as—Are the chapters organized chronically thematically, by group historical actors or from general to specific?

- Look, is the argument based on data, narrative or both?

- Is the argument convincing as a whole? Will one recommend this book to others, and if so, for whom? Is the argument convincing as a whole? Will one recommend this book to others, and if so, for whom?

After having written up your analyses, one is ready to compose one's review. Always remember there is not one way to format a book review but here is a common format that can be varied according to what one thinks need to be highlighted and what length is required.

- Introduce the author, the historical period and topic of the book. Tell the reader what genre of history this work belongs to or what approach the author has used. Set out the main argument.

- Summarize the book's organization and give a little more detail about the author's sub-arguments. Here one should also work in one's assessment of the evidence and sources used.

- Strengths and weaknesses or flaws in the book are usually discussed next. It is up to one to decide in what order these should come, but if one assesses the book positively overall, does not spend inordinate space on the book's faults.

In the conclusion, one may state one's recommendations for readership unless that has been covered in one's discussion of the book's strengths and weaknesses. One might review how convincing the argument was, say something about the importance or uniqueness of the argument and topic, or describe how the author adds to our understanding of a particular historical question.

Thus, by keeping in mind the above mentioned points, one will certainly be able to write a good book review which will not only express his/her own perception about the book but will help the other readers as well in making sense and proper understating of the book. It also helps the author to improve him/her in right direction in future writing.

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