

Johnson County Community College

Book Report/Review

The book report is a longer more involved writing about a book that has been read. It is not just a summary. The major purpose of a book report/review for most academic assignments is to **report on the nature and quality of the content**. You may include (in fact you should) feelings and opinions. **You do express your reaction to the book; you can make judgments**. The report is written from your point of view. A response to any reading will be based on the reader's experience, knowledge, and interpretation. **The response may be an evaluation of form and/or content**. It may be a personal application of the ideas to one's life. It may be an analysis of the possible effects that the article might have on readers within and outside of the field. It is important to know very clearly who the audience is for your book review and what your purpose is in writing for that audience.

Some questions to ask yourself regarding **audience**:

Who is my reader?

How much, if anything, does the reader already know about the book, or the topic the book deals with?

Since I cannot tell everything about the book, what are the key ideas I want to get across?

Do I want my reader to be persuaded that the book has some major strengths or weaknesses?

Do I want my reader to understand better some aspects of the book--its structure, its approach to the problem, its underlying assumptions?

Once your audience and purpose are clear, the list of questions below will help you analyze your book. **A good review usually includes a short summary and focuses on one of these questions or a coherent group of them**. Make sure that you **support all points with concrete examples from the book**, and follow the basic rules of writing.

1. Did you understand the material easily?

Did the author write clearly?

2. Did the writing seem too simplified?

Did you feel like the author was writing on a level suitable for the intended audience?

3. Did the author relate the information to everyday life or make practical applications?

Was it interesting or remote or unreal?

4. Are the author's facts accurate, so far as you know?

5. Does the author supply diagrams, charts, and illustrations to clarify the material?

6. What are the qualifications of the author?

7. Are there any new terms introduced?

Does the author adequately define them or use them clearly so you can determine the meanings?

8. What facts or ideas especially informed you? Why does the new knowledge impress you?

How are the facts or ideas presented?

Is the knowledge useful?

Does it change any ideas you previously had?

Novel Report/Review

When taking notes, besides answering the fact parts of the outline, ask and answer the following questions:

1. What is the **theme** of the book? Is there more than one theme?

What message do you get?

Is the theme successful?

2. Are the **characters** realistic? Do they seem real?

Do they have good and bad characteristics?

Do they act or/and react the way you would expect?

Do they stay "in character?"

Did you learn anything about human nature through the characters?

Do the characters have depth or are they superficial?

Are the characters archetypes or stereotypes?

3. Does the **dialogue** sound real?

What does it tell you about the characters?

Does it contribute to the storyline?

Is there dialect?

4. Is the **setting** appropriate to the story?

Is it described in vivid detail?

Can you "see" the scenes?

5. Does the **style** suit the plot and theme?

What is the style of writing?

Is it clear and simple? Light and amusing? Serious but straight-forward? Heavy and wordy? Full of effective figures of speech?

Possible outline:

I. Introduction--Identify book

A. Who is the author? (This is fact)

B. What type of book is it? (also fact)

II. Plot

- A. Briefly, what is the story about? (Fact)
- B. How does the story develop? (Opinion)

III. Characters

- A. Who are they? (Fact)
- B. How are they portrayed? (Opinion)

IV. Setting

- A. Where, when? (Fact)
- B. How is it described? (Opinion)

V. Style

- A. General characteristics (Fact)
- B. How did it appeal to you? (Opinion)

VI. Conclusion

- Sums up your impression (Opinion)
- Makes point of significance (Opinion)

Biography Report/Review

Possible questions to help analyze a biography or autobiography:

1. Is the book's subject presented as an ideal person who is always good and right?

Or do his bad as well as his good qualities show?

2. Do the times and places come to life for you?

Does the setting seem authentic?

3. Do you understand how the subject related to his time period/environment?

4. What influenced the growing up of the subject--his family, his education, his friends, his experience?

5. Is the subject admirable, despite his weaknesses?

6. Did he face up to his trials and conflicts and solve them, or did he sidestep them?

7. Are the conversations believable and in character?

8. Does the author's style contribute to your pleasure in the book, or did you keep reading just to find out what happened?

9. Would you like to know more about the subject of the biography or any persons portrayed in the book, or was your curiosity satisfied?

History and Current Events Books Reports/Reviews

Possible questions to help analyze history and current events books:

1. Does the author present only one viewpoint?

Does he examine various aspects of the background of events, or does he give one simplified explanation?

2. Is the background material clear and logical?

3. Does the author give a new perspective on the events he describes?

Was your attitude changed?

4. Did the author give all the facts?

Or did he slant the account but omitting or slighting certain facts?

5. Does the author distinguish clearly between the facts and his interpretation of the facts?

6. Were you impressed or displeased with the author's style?

7. What are the author's qualifications for writing about these events or this period?

His education and experience should be considered.

Science Book Report/Review

Possible questions to ask yourself before writing a report on a science book:

1. Did you understand the material easily?

Did the author write clearly?

Was your background sufficient for understanding the material?

2. Did the writing seem too simplified?

Did you feel like the author was writing down to you?

3. Did the author relate the information to everyday life?

Was it interesting or remote or unreal?

4. Are the author's facts accurate, so far as you know?
5. Does the author supply diagrams, charts, and illustrations to clarify the material?
6. What are the qualifications of the author?

Keep in mind the basic rules for writing any assignment:

1. Select only the main points.
2. Determine the length of a summary by your needs and the assignment.
3. Paragraph according to your material, not the author's.
4. Apportion your space fairly according to the material.
5. Avoid, in general, the author's phrasing and sentence structure. Do not, however, write a paraphrase.
6. Omit all extraneous comments from the summary part of the paper.
7. Sum up your general impression in the conclusion.
8. In the summary part of your paper, examples and illustrations are not necessary. In the discussion part of your paper, the examples may be used as support for the points of your focus. The entire paper should not be a summary unless so indicated by your instructor.
9. Begin with an introduction which is interesting, sets context and establishes the thesis or focus.
10. End with a conclusion in which you sum up your general impression.
11. Edit and proofread as you would any piece of writing. If possible, get someone to critique your paper before revising it. Visiting the Writing Center at this time would be advisable.