

Book Reviews

PURPOSE

Book reviews enable you to assimilate, and engage critically with, the content of a book from the perspective of the module that you are studying. The act of reading and evaluating the book will embed the learning that you have gleaned from it, as well as making connections with other reading and learning you will have done for the module. Evaluation of the book will develop your critical skills and encourage you to reflect on the impact of the book on yourself and your learning.

CONTENT

This is a written piece evaluating a book. It may include comparisons with other relevant literature in the field. A **comparative book review** requires you to engage with two or more books, to review them and critically compare them.

There is no standard template for writing a review: it is a personal piece of writing in response to a particular book. However, the following questions and suggestions may be helpful prompts for deciding what to include in your book review. Before writing your book review, look at some reviews in relevant journals.

1. Analyse the book

- What are the author's aims, overarching argument and overall thrust? The book's introduction and structure may well give you the answer, so do look carefully at the contents page.
- What genre of book is it? Who is it written for? The author may make this explicit, but if not, you need to work it out from the style and vocabulary of writing, and from what and how much is assumed in relation to knowledge or beliefs.
- Where is the author coming from? This would include matters such as their area of expertise and why they are (or are not!) worth reading on the subject, and their theological perspective. Here you will need to draw on the wider reading and learning you will have done for the module.
- It is important not to describe each chapter in detail and there is no need to comment on absolutely everything (that is impossible!). Part of the skill of writing a book review is being selective. One way of doing this might be to identify some key motifs or themes.

2. Evaluate the book - remembering to provide evidence from the book to support your views

- How successful is the author in achieving his/her aims?
- How clear and accessible is it? Think about whether terms are explained and whether its arguments are easy to follow. Is it very theoretical or highly practical? Is it enjoyable to read or more like trudging through a swamp? This section should be brief.

- How accurate is it? Are there claims made that you know to be wrong or which are not adequately defended?
- What is missing? Given what it is trying to do, are there major omissions in terms of content or method?
- How does it defend its views? For example, what sort of appeal is made to Scripture, tradition and reason?
- What did you gain from it and what makes it worth reading?

WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

First and foremost, we are looking to see how your book review demonstrates that you have met the learning outcomes of the Module Outline. In your book review you need to:

1. demonstrate understanding
... by showing that you have read and understood the purpose and contents of the whole book you are reviewing (ie not just a chapter or two!) and can give a fair account of these, locating the book in its field.
2. critically evaluate
...by showing that you can read critically and can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the book (in terms of its arguments, presentation, style, success in achieving its goal etc) and support this evaluation with evidence from the book and from your learning in the module.
3. reflect on the impact of the book
...by showing that you have reflected on the impact of the book on you (and potentially on other readers).
4. consider its readership
... by showing that you have thought about your own audience and the book's intended readership and have identified where the book is particularly helpful and where it is unhelpful.

TECHNICAL MATTERS

For the tutor:

- It may be helpful to indicate the audience of the book review to determine whether it is a communication to a specialist or non-specialist audience and to give the review an 'angle'.
- In the case of a comparative book review, it is important to specify the number of books students should engage with.
- It is important to choose a book that maximises coverage of learning outcomes of the module, and to state what these are to students.

For the student:

- Book reviews should be written in a concise style, following the style guidelines for essay writing.
 - We would expect you to refer to other works in the field, and so you should include references and a bibliography in the same way as you would for an essay.
 - A short quotation or two from the book is good practice.
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MARKING CRITERIA

The questions that your marker will be considering when assessing your work are as follows:

1. How does your book review demonstrate that you have acquired the knowledge, understanding and skills of the relevant learning outcomes of the module?
2. To what standard have you fulfilled these? These standards – by which your work will be graded – are described in the **Assessment Criteria for Essays and Other Written Assignments** for the level of your module. The criteria against which your work will be marked fall into five categories:

Knowledge and understanding: Does your work demonstrate a thorough and accurate understanding of the book and its wider subject matter?

Use of sources and evidence: Have you used a good range of appropriate sources – in addition to the book being reviewed – in your work?

Have you used your sources – including the book being reviewed – effectively as evidence for your argument and reasoning?

Critical thinking, reasoning and analysis: Does your work show your ability to identify issues and think critically about them?

Are you able to make relevant connections between different points?

Argument: Is your evaluation of the book well argued?

Is the structure of your review clear and does it contribute to the evaluation?

Presentation: Is your writing clear, using appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar and spelling?

Is your work presented and referenced well, using the conventions stipulated by your TEI?