

Starting Points: Responses to Literature

The following questions will help you react personally to the books you read. Use this list only when you can't think of your own starting point. (By changing the questions slightly, you can use this same list to react to other forms of literature—plays, poems, short stories, etc.)

Making Connections

1. What were your feelings after reading the opening chapter(s) of the book? After reading half of the book? After finishing the book?
2. Did the book make you laugh? Cry? Cringe? Smile? Cheer? Explain.
3. What connections are there between the book and your life? Explain.
4. What is the most important word in the book? The most important passage? The most important event? Explain.
5. Who else should read this book? Why?

Points of Interest

6. What are the best parts of the book? Why? What are the worst parts? Why?
7. Do you like the ending of the book? Why or why not?
8. What came as a surprise in the book? Why?
9. What parts of the book seem most believable or unbelievable? Why?
10. What makes you wonder in this book? What confuses you?

Strictly in Character

11. In what ways are you like any of the characters? Explain.
12. Do any of the characters remind you of friends, family members, or classmates? Explain.
13. Which character would you like to be in this book? Why?
14. What would you and your favorite character talk about?

Careful Reflections

15. Do you think the title fits the book? Why or why not?
16. What was the author saying about life and living?
17. Has this book helped you in some way? Explain.
18. How have you changed after reading this book? Explain.
19. What do you know now that you didn't know before?
20. What questions in this book would you like answered?

"You are the same today that you will be five years from now except for two things: the people you meet and the books you read."

—Mac McMillan

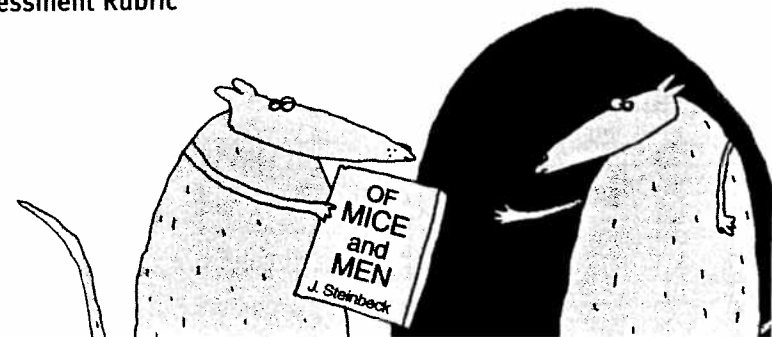
Writing a BOOK REVIEW

Everyone has his or her own personal tastes. While you may love Mexican food, your best friend may go for Italian dishes. While you may dig the blues, your brother may like rock or reggae. The same is true of the books you read. While you may enjoy science fiction or science fantasy, the next person may enjoy modern dramas.

One way to share your personal taste in literature is to review the books you read. A book review is a brief essay expressing your personal opinion about a book's value. An effective book review is informative and enjoyable to read. It highlights key parts of a book without giving the whole story away. It provides thoughtful explanations and reflections to support your main points. Most importantly, it helps readers decide if they should read the book themselves.

Preview

- Book Review: Fiction
- Book Review: Nonfiction
- Mini-Reviews
- Assessment Rubric



WRITING GUIDELINES

Book Review

In a review, you express your opinion about the value or worth of a book you have read. However, simply stating that something was good or bad is not enough. You need to support your feelings with thoughtful explanations and specific references to the book itself. (You can use the following guidelines to review short stories, poems, movies, concerts—as well as books.)

PREWRITING

- 1. Choosing a Subject . . .** Review a book that you have recently read, one that you have strong feelings about.
- 2. Gathering Details . . .** Collect your initial thoughts and feelings about your subject through freewriting. Or, if you want to work more systematically, list in one column the book's strong points and in another column its weak points. Continue exploring and collecting ideas as needed.
- 3. Focusing Your Efforts . . .** Read through your ideas, and put a check next to the details you would like to include in your review. *Remember:* You can't say everything. Reviewers usually comment on the important parts of a book without giving away too much of the story.

WRITING AND REVISING

- 4. Connecting Your Ideas . . .** Develop your first draft according to your planning and prewriting. Make sure to identify the book's title and author in one of the opening lines.
- 5. Improving Your Writing . . .** As you read through your first draft, make sure that you have stated your ideas clearly and completely: *Will readers be able to follow your main points? Will they know how you feel about the book and why?* Revise your review accordingly.

EDITING AND PROOFREADING

- 6. Checking for Style and Accuracy . . .** Study your revised writing for style. Make sure that all of your sentences read smoothly and that you have used the best words to express your ideas. Then check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.
[HOT LINK] See "Assessment Rubric," page 226, for a helpful revising and editing guide.
- 7. Preparing a Final Copy . . .** Write or keyboard a neat final copy of your review; proofread the final copy before sharing it.

Assessment Rubric

Use this rubric to evaluate book reviews and literary analyses. It is arranged according to the traits of good writing described in your handbook. (See pages 21-26.)

Stimulating Ideas

The writing . . .

- addresses a single piece of literature (movie, performance).
- focuses on one or more important elements (plot, character, setting, or theme).
- contains supporting details and examples from the work.
- maintains a clear and consistent view from start to finish.

Logical Organization

- includes an effective beginning, strong supporting details, and a convincing conclusion.
- presents ideas in an organized manner (perhaps offering the strongest point first or last).

Engaging Voice

- speaks in a convincing and knowledgeable way.
- shows that the writer clearly understands the text.

Original Word Choice

- explains or defines any unfamiliar terms.
- pays special attention to word choice.

Effective Sentence Style

- flows smoothly from one idea to the next.

Correct, Accurate Copy

- observes the basic rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- follows the appropriate formatting guidelines.