Western Writing Support Centre

Book Reviews

Book reports are a type of *informative writing* because they tell the reader what a particular book is about. Book reviews also summarize the contents of books, but they go beyond this simple task to make statements about the **value** of a particular book to the discipline of which it is a part. In this respect, book reviews are examples of *argumentative/persuasive writing*, and therefore they require **thesis statements**.

The Argument

The most common mistake students make when coming up with thesis statements for their book reviews is to make their arguments about the topics covered in the books. For example, a student writing a review of Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* would **not** want to focus his or her argument on free markets and their relationship to democratic societies, but would rather want to make an argument that says something about the **book's value to the more general conversation** concerning capitalism and democracy. The student should imagine having to answer the question, "If I wanted to know more about capitalism's influence on democracies, should I read this book? And why or why not?"

To answer this question, the student will first have to assess:

➢ **The Book's Author**
- Background and qualifications
- Purpose in writing the book
- Writing style
- Use of sources (see Bibliography and Table of Charts and Figures)
➢ **The Book's Format**
- Table of Contents
- Index
- Chapter and section titles
- Introduction
➢ **The Book's Content**
- Introduction/Conclusion
- Preface
- Chapter summaries
- Tables, Graphs, Figures, etc.

In each case, the student must determine if the element in question improves the book or not, and then decide if both the effective and ineffective elements taken together give the book value as a resource. For example, a particular author's writing style might be very interesting and engaging, but if he or she has used sources of questionable authenticity in his/her research, then you could conclude that, overall, the book is not worthwhile.

The Structure

Introductory paragraph:

- In the first sentence, identify the **author's name, title of text, format of text** (book, article, speech, etc.), and **the subject of focus**
- Then, establish the **author's credentials**
- Identify the book's **intended audience**
- Identify the author's **argument**
- State **your thesis** evaluating the book's value to its discipline

Content Summary paragraph(s):

- Remember to be **objective**! You are not arguing anything at this stage
- Identify the major **sections** of the book
- Clarify the author's **purpose, objective, or research question**
- Describe the **sources and evidence** the author presents
- Show how the **evidence connects to the author's argument**
- Explain important **outcomes and conclusions**

The Main Body (analysis paragraphs):

- Now you will argue **for or against the book's value**
- Evaluate the author's **style** (simple/technical; persuasive/logical?)
- Evaluate the **methodology** (comparison/contrast; cause/effect; analogy; by example)
- Evaluate the **sources and evidence** (primary/secondary; maps; charts; expert testimonials; quotations; interviews; newspaper stories)
- Determine whether the evidence is convincing and provide examples to justify your opinion
- Indicate whether or not there is important **evidence missing** from the text
- Identify a **comparable text** that has included this information

Concluding paragraph:

- Briefly summarize all the **strengths and weaknesses** of the book
- Evaluate the book's **overall usefulness** to its intended audience