

A Guide for Book Reviews *

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Abstract

A book review is a multifaceted critical analysis of a book and an evaluation on the quality, value/meaning, significance, and contribution of the book to its own subject/field. It is not a report, summary, or advertisement, rather it is a serious scholarly work. Book reviews have certain functions such as, for *academics*, being aware of the recently published books and saving time by getting an idea about those publications through reading experts' evaluations about their significance, value, and contributions; for *publishers*, finding an opportunity for a kind of advertisement of their publications that mostly remain to a limited environment like academia; for *authors*, receiving a feedback about their books to enable them to improve them in future editions. Although there is not only one right method for book reviews, because they are *personal* and reflect the reviewer's personal ideas and remarks, this note makes suggestions on how to compose an ideal book review after providing a brief description of the nature of book reviews and includes some relevant technical notes hoping to be a helpful guide for those who want to write a book review.

Keywords

Scholarly journals, Academic writings, Book, Book reviews, Guide

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Kitap Deęerlendirmesi Yazım Kılavuzu

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Kitap deęerlendirme yazısı, bir kitabın ilgili olduęu konudaki/sahadaki yeri, nemi, deęeri ve katkısına dair ok ynl eleştirel analizidir. Bir tanıtım, zet veya reklam olmayıp ciddi akademik bir faaliyettir. Kitap deęerlendirmeleri *akademisyenler iin alıřtıkları veya ilgi duydukları konu(lar)/saha(lar)da yeni ıkan kitaplardan haberdar olma, bu kitapların tařıdıkları nem ve deęer ile sahaya yaptıkları katkıya dair bir uzman grř almak suretiyle bir kanaat oluřturarak zamandan tasarruf etme; yayınevleri iin oęu zaman akademya gibi sınırlı bir evre iinde kalan yayınlarının tanıtımının gerekleřmesi; yazarlar iin de yayınına dair bir dnt alma ve sonraki baskılar iin yetkinleřtirme imknı sunma gibi fonksiyonlar icra eder. Kiřisel olmaları ve deęerlendirenin kiřisel fikir ve yorumlarını yansıtması sebebiyle kitap deęerlendirme yazıları iin tek bir doęru usul bulunmamakla birlikte, bu yazı, kitap deęerlendirme yazısı yazmak isteyenler iin faydalı bir rehber olma midiyle kitap deęerlendirme yazılarının mahiyeti ile ilgili kısa bir tasvir sunduktan sonra ideal bir kitap deęerlendirme yazısının nasıl oluřturulabileceęine dair neriler getirmekte ve birtakım teknik notları iermektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler

Bilimsel Dergiler, Akademik Yazılar, Kitap, Kitap Deęerlendirmesi, Rehber

A book review is a multifaceted critical analysis of a book and an evaluation on the quality, value/meaning, significance, and contribution of the book to its own subject/field. It is not a report, summary, or advertisement. Therefore, it is such a serious scholarly work that as an academic one does not want to be indifferent. Determining the features of a book, such as its contribution to the relevant academic field, value, strengths and weaknesses, etc. can only be managed by an expert who follows the literature regarding that book's subject and has adequate knowledge and experience in the field. So, it is not correct to consider this type of writings a type of practice for academic writing for Master and Ph.D. students –except for those having a special interest in and knowledge about the subject due to their thesis and specific studies.

Book reviews have certain functions such as, for *academics*, being aware of the recently published books and saving time by getting an idea about those publications through reading experts' evaluations about their significance, value, and contributions; for *publishers*, finding an opportunity for a kind of advertisement of their publications that mostly remain to a limited environment like academia; for *authors*, receiving feedbacks about their books to enable them to improve them in future editions.

Book reviews provide an opportunity to follow up new publications, so preference should be given to recently published books to review. This, actually, is a natural result of the publication of many books worth reviewing in every year. For that reason, the books to review published particularly in the last five years are of priority to review.

Book reviews are never a means to attack the author. Review is different from attack. Reviews are in fact an author-friendly activity which helps the author to improve his/her book in the sequent editions. Turning reviews into attacks brings about the loss of their seriousness and value.

There is not only one right method for book reviews, because they are *personal* and reflect the reviewer's personal ideas and remarks. Thus, some reviews highlight a particular aspect of the book while some aim to correct a mistake included and some serve for the reviewer to reveal his/her personal ideas and findings. If the personal findings and remarks of the reviewer are much more than his/her evaluations on the book, it is appropriate to publish it as a *review article*, not a book review.

It would be beneficial to put forward some suggestions to guide those who want to write a book review, even though such writings do not have any standard pattern and method. A book review can follow the steps below:

FIRST STEP: CHOOSING THE RIGHT BOOK

Choosing the book to review is the first, but the most important step. It could be done by both the researcher and/or the book review editor of a scholarly journal. In the first, the researcher offers a specific book to the editor to write a review on it. The process starts on the approval of the editor. In the second, the editor chooses a book and invites a researcher to review it. The process starts on the positive response of the researcher to the invitation. In both methods, choosing the "right book" is of

a great importance. The book must be worth reviewing in terms of academic standards, it should not be a waste of time for both the reviewer and the reader, and should be written on a subject in which the reviewer is an expert. If not so, the expectation of the book review to provide an idea about the importance and value of the book can not be met. Therefore, a book on which the reviewer “has something to say” must be chosen.

Another point that should not be neglected in choosing the right book is that there should not be any mutual interest, relationship based on love and hate between the reviewer and the author, in brief, *ethical limits should not be violated*. In other words, it is important that the reviewer should not be the advisor, student, friend, superior or inferior, opponent etc. of the author, because this means that fairness expected in the review can barely be provided. One should choose, whether it is chosen by the reviewer or the editor, a book that is subject to a fair evaluation must be chosen.

SECOND STEP: READING THE BOOK PROPERLY, IN A MULTIFACETED, AND CRITICAL WAY

The reviewer should not read the book like an ordinary reading, but seek answers to certain questions, make multifaceted queries, and take notes. For instance,

- Who is the author of the book, what are his/her other works, interests, and competence?
- What are the goals and aims the author wants to realize? Are they academic or ideological?
- What type is the book (textbook, thesis, research etc.)? If this point is neglected, it will be possible to make mistakes. To expect original arguments, profound discussions, and elaborate analysis from a textbook would be barking up the wrong tree and it would be unfair to criticize it for having such deficiencies.
- What is the audience of the book (academics, general readers, etc.) and is it written appropriately for its intended audience?
- What are the arguments the author makes? Does the reviewer agree with them or think them not adequately grounded? If the reviewer has rejections, he/she should reveal and prove them.
- What is the situation of the book in terms of consistency, clarity, originality, strongness, the accurate use of the concepts, expressing itself well, preciseness of the improvement stages, fluency, etc?
- What is the style of the book, didactic, academic etc? Does it maintain its own style throughout the whole book or is there any violation of it?
- Is the plan of the book successful and is the author successful in realizing his/her purposes?
- Is the author’s use of sources successful? Does he/she use primary or secondary sources; does he/she make a literature review; are there any important referential sources he/she neglects? In the

use of sources, it is crucial to question whether a crime of any type of plagiarism is committed and to check it out with cross examination.

- Does the book include any enriched elements such as charts, tables, editions of text, translations, indice etc? Are they useful and functional?

- Are there any typos resulted from the author's carelessness or the print? These are helpful advices for the author to improve his/her book in the possible following editions.

- Lastly, the reviewer could conclude its review by stating his/her personal impression the book left on him/her, whether the book made any change in his/her past ideas, and whether the book could be recommended or not and why.

THIRD STEP: COMPOSING THE REVIEW

While composing the review, the reviewer can follow the steps below:

Introduction

Drawing a general frame regarding the book reviewed. The reviewer notes the author's reasons, aims, and goals to write the book here. Thus, it evaluates to what extent the author manages to fulfill that in the following pages.

Body 1

A general description presenting the plan and contents of the book. Here one makes the reader ready to remarks and criticisms that could be made.

Body 2

Organizing the notes taken during the reading in accordance with the second step explained above in a successful course.

Body 3

Evaluation of the author's arguments and grounding the objections the reviewer has.

To the conclusion

Drawing attention to the contributions the book makes to its subject/field and making remarks on the importance and value, the strengths and weaknesses the book holds.

Conclusion

Concluding the review with short sentences giving an idea to the reader about what makes sense for the audience of the book, whether the expectations from the book's title, author, and arguments are met or not.

The ideal measure for book reviews is between 1.000-1.500 words. For this reason, the reviewer should not have the concern to tell everything about the book he/she thinks or determines and should confine himself/herself to pointing out significant points to him/her, because this is not only the review that will be written on the book. Moreover, long reviews discourage the reader to read them.

It is important to maintain academic language and direct criticisms against the book, not its author, and not to provoke the author to take it personally.

Reviews submitted to the journal are generally examined by the editor. The reviewer should take suggestions and corrections by the editor seriously. Publication of reviews is done on the approval of the editorial board of the journal. Since each review is a kind of personal, hence subjective evaluation, the author of the reviewed book is always entitled to respond. The editor should be fair to assess the responses. Journals mostly welcome responses to reviews.

REFERENCES

Gmbeyaz, Kadir. "Kitap Deęerlendirmesi Yazım Kılavuzu". *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 21/2 (December 2017): 1415-1420, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.362700>