

### Definition of genre

A book review both describes and evaluates a work of fiction or non-fiction. It describes a book's over-all purpose, its structure, and style of narration, attempting to place the book in a larger context by comparing it to other books of its kind. If the book is fictional, the reviewer will pay primary attention to the book's setting, plot, characters, use of language and voice. If the book is nonfiction, the reviewer will pay primary attention to the major points (the argument) the author is putting forth and to the sources the author has drawn upon to back up his or her point of view.

### Questions to ask

- What genre or classification does the book fit into? (Fiction or nonfiction? Mystery, science fiction, family drama, poetry; biography, political analysis, philosophical treatise, travel book?)
- Who is the author and what is his/her background? What is the author's goal and over-all theme?
- How does this book relate to others on the same topic or similar topics?
- What is the book's basic structure or plot?
- If the work is nonfiction, what sources did the author use and are they reliable and well-documented? Does the author make a convincing argument?
- If the work is fiction, does the author create a world that you can believe in? What is the author's point of view, the voice he/she is adopting? Who are the main characters and are they well-portrayed? What is the setting, the basic plot? What sort of language does the author use?

### Actions to take

- Carefully read and re-read the prompt. (Are you supposed to focus on specific aspects of the book?)
- Mark/highlight important passages or points as you read.
- Finish the book before forming your conclusions about it.
- Brainstorm and write down your impressions of the book shortly after you finish it. Think about how it affected you and possibly changed your thinking.
- Map your impressions and thoughts into a possible structure for your paper, paying close attention to answering whatever prompt your professor gave you.

- Head the review with the following information: Title. Author. Place of publication: publisher, date of publication. Number of pages.
- Write a rough draft of your review, once you have determined the main points you want to make.
- Include key quotations from the book.
- Make sure you're both providing your reader with an overview of the book's content *and* evaluating that content according to clearly stated standards.

### **Helpful links**

Suggestion: Search Google for "Writing book reviews" to find many sites and lots of good material, including samples of book reviews. A few noteworthy sites include:

<http://faculty.washington.edu/krumme/guides/dreview.html>

Good suggestions on how to approach writing a book review, from Prof. Günter Krumme at the University of Washington-Seattle. Particularly useful for writing about academic titles.

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/publication-types/book-reviews>

A definition of a book review and how to write one, from Simon Fraser University Library.

### **Examples**

Any of the below publications will give you a good idea of what a book review for a general audience should look like. For academic audiences, research relevant journals in the field.

[\*The New Yorker\*](#)

[\*The New York Review of Books\*](#)

[\*The New York Times Book Review\*](#)