

Writing a Book Report or Critical Review

What is a Book Report/Critical Review?

A book report or critical review is a detailed summary and “reader response.” You simply summarize the book that you read and then explain your reaction or response to it (hence, “reader response”).

You Should:

- **Read the book carefully and take notes on it before, during, and after your reading**
 - Take notes on the book’s author, title, chapter titles (if it has them), and cover
 - Before you start reading, what do you expect the book to be about?
 - Take notes on the book’s plot, characters, setting, point of view, tone, and theme.
- **Decide what you think the author’s purpose, message, or theme was supposed to be**
 - What is the author trying to tell the reader? Why? Is the author’s message correct? Partially correct? Explain your opinion.
- **Do outside research to help you understand the book and its author**
 - Background information on the book’s subject, plot, characters, setting, and author can be very helpful for better understanding the book
 - For example, if the book is about a Native American Indian tribe, it might be helpful to know something about the tribe. You can then determine the accuracy of the book.

You Should NOT:

- **Retell the plot of the book**
 - If your reader wanted to know the book’s story, he or she would read the book.
 - Instead, your reader wants to know your thoughts on the book.
 - Therefore, *you should explain the theme or purpose of the book, how the author communicated the theme, and your opinion of the book/theme.*
- **Try to include every single event, character, or detail from the book**
 - If you do this, you will accidentally retell the plot of the book.
 - And you will accidentally include a lot of details that are not relevant to the book’s theme.

An effective Book Report or Critical Review will have

- An Introduction that
 - Identifies the author and title of the book being reviewed
 - Briefly summarizes the book AND states its theme, message, or purpose
 - **States your reaction to the book and its theme, message, or purpose**
 - **Did the author do a good job communicating the book’s message? Do you agree with the message? Did you like the book overall? Explain your opinions.**
- Body Paragraphs that
 - Begin with Topic Sentences that relate to your reaction to the book’s theme or message
 - Support your reaction to the book with specific details, examples, and quotes from the book
 - Cite and introduce ALL examples and quotes from the book
 - **Explain why you are using these examples and quotes to support your reaction (your thesis)**
- A Conclusion that
 - Restates the book’s theme, message, or purpose
 - Restates your reaction to the book
 - Summarizes the reasons for your reaction