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Book or Article Review Guidelines

Always check with your professor to make sure you understand the specific requirements of an assignment. This handout contains general guidelines.

Purpose: The purpose of a book or article review is to let readers know what a work is about and what its merits are so that they can decide whether or not they want to read the work. Usually, readers of a review have not read the work under discussion.

Choosing a Work: Sometimes your professor assigns a particular book or article; however, your professor may give you a list of works to choose from or a broad field that you will have to narrow first to a specific area and then to a specific work. If you are given a choice, try to find a work that interests you.

1. Ask someone whose judgment you trust for a recommendation or try to find a work by an author who is respected in the field. Your textbook may contain a helpful bibliography.
2. Examine the work carefully to see whether the subject and treatment of the subject are appealing to you. Check contents, indexes, and introductions.
3. Flip through the text and read portions of it in order to determine whether the vocabulary and style are clear and comprehensible to you.
4. If you do not know if a work is appropriate for the assignment, confer with your professor.

Content of the Review: All reviews should (1) identify the work and the author, (2) include a summary of the work, and (3) include an evaluation. Other elements may be requested or required by your professor; if you are uncertain, ask the professor. A review may include some or all of the following:

1. An abstract, summary, or synopsis that provides the essential content and main ideas of the work.
2. A statement or thorough discussion of the author's thesis (main underlying idea), purpose, and evidence or methods.
3. A brief biographical sketch of the intellectual life of the author, linking the work under discussion to the author's other works.
4. A discussion of the relationship between the work being reviewed and other works in the field.
5. Your evaluation of the work, clearly presented and well supported.

6. Selected short quotations from the work that are representative of the thesis, tone, and style.

Organization: The following structure is simply a recommendation, but it does contain the normal elements of a history book review.

1. Original Title. Your title is not the same as the title of the work under discussion but may include the work's title. Do not italicize or write quotation marks around your own title. Do italicize the titles of books and periodicals and place quotation marks around article titles. Try to make the title interesting so that the reader will want to read your review.

EXAMPLE: Fighting the Good Fight, A Review of John Shy's *A People Numerous and Armed*

2. Full Bibliographical Citation. History book reviews almost always start with a full citation, separated from your title by two lines of space and leaving two lines of space before you begin the body of your essay. It is normal to use the *Chicago Manual of Style's* citation system to format your citation.

EXAMPLE: John Shy. *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1990.

3. Introduction/Thesis Paragraph. Include one or more general statements that give a quick indication of the work's contents and your reaction to it and your thesis statement. Your thesis should be your main argument and the focus of the review. This will normally be a critique of the book in its broadest sense. Ask yourself, "Is the book worthwhile for others to read? Why or why not?"

4. Body/Supporting Paragraphs. The number of body paragraphs varies according to the nature of the assignment and the extent of what you have to say. In general, there will be at least one paragraph of summary and at least one paragraph of evaluation.

-In your summary paragraph, include all of the significant points of the work, especially the points the author emphasizes.

-Explain the purpose of the work and, if appropriate, the author's background and methodology (often found in the preface, foreword, or introduction).

-Present your critical evaluation, discussing both the positive and negative features of the work. Support all of your judgments with evidence from the work, paraphrasing and quoting excerpts when appropriate. Some questions to consider include:

-Is the thesis of the book well supported?

-Is the work thorough? Fair? Clear? Convincing? Significant?

-How does the work relate to other works in the field or to your general understanding of the subject?

-Is the author's use of evidence appropriate and convincing? Is the evidence from diverse sources?

5. Conclusion: Give an overall evaluation of the work at hand. In a review, make a recommendation about the type of reader likely to enjoy or benefit from the work or the work's significance to the field.

Format

The final paper should be typed and double-spaced. Provide margins of one inch on all sides. Number all pages except the first page. Proofread your final copy carefully and make corrections.