

Review Manual

"A bad book is as much of a labour to write as a good one; it comes as sincerely from the author's soul." (T. Huxley)

Writing a review is 'doing valuing,' resulting from the power to do the valuing.

Reviewing is more than a recommendation service, unless it is for children.

Reviews can be written in an impressionist or judicial manner. However, too much critique might put off; more informative content might draw a reader.

Reviews are essays which demand adequate description; need to communicate quality; and give impressionist criticism.

A critic writes for an informed audience who knows the field, can concentrate on an aspect or special angle. Readers here rather look for correctly proportioned critique.

A reviewer must assume that the reader is not familiar with the field. The reader expects a good piece of reading in itself.

Reviewing fiction is about not giving the plot away; reviewing non-fiction is about pointing out the main thesis.

A reviewed item is always anchored in an objective context independent from the beliefs and tastes of the reviewer.

What a Good Review should do

- make clear what the author intended to do
- show who the appropriate reader will be and what the material will offer
- definite impression as to what the judgement of the author is
- the reviewer needs candor and lucidness
- address as many readers as possible – not a small coterie
- write from a point of view to show where you stand

Useful Questions for a Check List

Who wrote the book/directed the film?

What is the title, when and where was it published?

What is it about?

How does it compare with other works of the same author?

How does it compare with other works on the same subject?

Does the material give the full length of the picture of the subject?

What is the point of view/main thesis of the author?

How is the subject matter organised?

Is the treatment of the subject matter done with expertise or is it superficial?

What are the sources, and are they documented?

How did the public/other reviewers react?

Why do People Read/Watch Films?

- widen their experience
- escape
- to take part in/contribute to discourse
- feed special interest
- connoisseur
- entertainment !

Which material to choose?

- anything you think would be worthwhile that fits the agenda – it could be the book you are reading at the moment, or one you remember to have been a good read or film or image
- newly published/released material you want to draw attention to
- anything that you would put on a top 100 of must reads/see films to better understand the Middle East.