

## Book reviews: how to write them and where to find them

### 1. What is a book review?

Book reviews are important sources of information about current research being carried out in different subject fields. They serve not only to announce the existence of new titles, but also to evaluate the book concerned. Reviews of academic books are usually published in key journals for that discipline. There is no standard format for the content. Some may be fairly brief, others are 'review-essays' giving a much broader treatment of the subject.

### 2. How to write a book review for an assignment

There is no set format for a book review assignment and tutors may want quite different things. Above all, follow any guidance provided by your tutor or in your module handbook as to what is required.

The following sources will give you some general guidance on writing academic book reviews.

Quick guides from other universities:

- UCL 'Writing a Critical Review': <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-writing-centre/critical-reading-and-writing/critical-review>
- University of Nottingham 'Book reviews': <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studyingeffectively/writing/writingtasks/bookreviews.aspx>

Useful books available at Brookes Library:

- Craswell, G. and Poore, M. (2012) *Writing for academic success*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London: Sage. See Chapter 6: 'Book or article reviews' pp. 107-110.
- Swales, J. M. and Feak, C. B. (2012) *Academic writing for graduate students: essential tasks and skills*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. See Unit six: 'Writing critiques', pp. 228-248.
- Taylor, G. (2009) *A student's writing guide: how to plan and write successful essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See 'Appendix 1', pp. 240-242.

Books on developing your critical reading and critical thinking skills may also be helpful. Check this list of useful books, online guides and other support: *Study skills: Writing essays, reports and other assignments* at <https://rl.talis.com/3/brookes/lists/AC92E7AE-DA83-0ACB-E33B-5A9A4DFF63CA.html> It includes a section 'Critical reading, critical thinking & constructing arguments'

### 3. How to find published book reviews

Book reviews may be published in specialist review journals, newspapers and subject journals which contain review sections.

#### Review Journals

These print journals are shelved in the Basement at Headington Library:

- *London Review of Books* J 028 L
- *New York Review of Books* J 028 N
- *Times Literary Supplement* J 028 T

#### Newspapers

Some newspapers also devote extensive space to book reviews. These include:

- *The Guardian and The Observer*  
Current online access is available via the databases Lexis Library (1992-) and Factiva (1989-). Older articles are available via the database ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer which covers *The Guardian* (1821 – 2003) and *The Observer* (1791 – 2003).
- *The Times and Sunday Times*  
Current online access is available via the databases Lexis Library (1985-) and Factiva (1985-). Older articles are available via the database Times Digital Archive (1785-2007)

To access any of these newspaper databases, go to the Library's 'News and current affairs' page at: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/resources/news-and-current-affairs/>

#### Subject Journals

Journals provide one of the best sources of information on current academic research, debates and specialised topics. Book reviews form an important part of many of these journals. Useful titles for English Literature, Drama and Creative Writing students include:

- Critical inquiry
- Nineteenth-century literature
- Romanticism
- Shakespeare quarterly
- Twentieth century literature: a scholarly and critical journal
- Victorian studies

To access a specific e-journal where you know the title, go to the Library home page at: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/> and click on the **Journal titles** tab. Type in the title of the journal that you want to find. This will give you relevant connection link(s) and coverage details.

If you want to search for book reviews from a range of journals, use a subject database. To find out which databases are recommended for your subject area/course, go to the Library home page at: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/> and choose on the **Find a database** tab. Click on the drop-down menu to 'Browse our databases by subject'.

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Below are some tips on finding book reviews on specific databases.

EBSCO Host databases. These include: **Academic Search Complete; Art Full Text; Communication and Mass Media Complete; Historical Abstracts; MLA International Bibliography**

- Type in the title of the book and the author in the search box(es)
- In the bottom half of the screen you have options to 'limit your results'. Scroll down to the box labelled 'Document type' and browse through the list of options available.
- Select 'Book review'

### Performing arts periodicals database

- In Advanced Search, type in the title of the book and the author in the search box(es).
- Scroll down the screen to select 'Review' from the list next to 'Document Type'.

### JSTOR

This is a multidisciplinary database with an emphasis on older material and is therefore a good database to use for book reviews from the earlier part of the 20th Century. To find book reviews:

- In Advanced Search, type in the title of the book and the author in the search box(es).
- Scroll down the screen to select 'Review' from the list next to 'Narrow by – Item Type'.

**Web of Science (WoS)** - includes the Arts & Humanities Citation Index

- Type in the book details in the first search box.
- When your search results are displayed, the 'Refine Results' box on the left of the screen allows you to select a specific document type. Select 'Book Review' and click on 'Refine'.

**Factiva** is an international news database. To search the database for book reviews:

- Type the book details in the 'Free Text' search box.
- Click on 'Subject', then type 'reviews' in the Subject box. In the list of results, click on the heading 'Books' to select it.

Other databases may not have the same limit options but you can use the word 'review' as a keyword in addition to the book details.