

I.B. History Book Reviews—Guidelines

Written reviews should be approximately 700 words. The oral presentations should be approximately 10 minutes, and you can expect approximately ten minutes of discussion and questions from other students at the conclusion. There are two parts to the review: the summary of the book and your critical comments. In the course of these two parts, four major questions should be answered:

1. What is the book about?
2. Is the book reliable as a source of historical knowledge?
3. Is the material well presented?
4. What, if anything, did the book contribute to your knowledge and understanding of the history of the period?

1. What is the book about?

This query, of course, leads to others. Does the book have a central theme? Does it argue a thesis? What is the author's purpose? S/he may have stated this explicitly in a preface or conclusion, or it may be implied within the book. How well did the author accomplish her purpose? Did s/he really accomplish it, or did s/he do something else? At some point in the review, try to summarize the theme, or thesis, in a single sentence; also in a paragraph. In no case, however, should statement of the content of the book exceed, in this type of review, 300 words, nor should it summarize chapter by chapter.

2. Is the book reliable?

Who is the author? How old is s/he? When was the book written? What kinds of sources—primary or secondary—were used? In what form does the author present her sources? How reliable were the primary or secondary sources? Is there any evidence of selective use of evidence? Is there a bias reflecting a particular political, social, economic, religious, national, cultural, or ethnic group? Do you believe the facts are correct? Do you consider the interpretations valid? Do you believe that the thesis is well-supported by the evidence and reasoning? Has the author persuaded you to accept her conclusions and point of view?

3. Is the material well-presented?

Is the book understandable? Is the subject-matter well-organized? Is it introduced in simple terms, or does the author plunge the reader into complexities which presuppose a general knowledge of the subject on the part of the reader? Is the book recommended for the general student or for the professional specialist?

4. What, if anything, did the book contribute to your knowledge and understanding of history? Would you recommend the book to another student in this course? Yes or no, and for what reasons?

General Suggestions:

In your summary and comment, use your own words. If you use those of the author, show the page number in brackets. Use a footnote only if the quotations is from someone else and include in it, author, book title, date and place of publication, and page.

Do not try to write your review by answering all the above-mentioned questions one by one. Some will not be pertinent to your particular book. Besides, the review should be made up of a few closely integrated themes and not a series of unconnected answers.

At the top of the review, use the proper bibliographical format to identify the book.

PAPER CHECKLIST

Before turning in your paper, check to see that you have done all of the following things. In doing so, you will avoid some of "Gall's pet peeves."

1. Use unlined paper.
2. Have a title page and number all pages (*except* page #1).
3. Identify any speaker or writer you quote. Don't assume I know who made the statement you use.
4. For any quote over four lines - use a *block quote*. No quotation marks are necessary in this case.
5. Avoid *contractions* (use *do not*, not *don't*).
6. When you introduce a new idea, start a new paragraph.
7. Have a good introduction that both introduces topic (thesis statement) and creates interest. Avoid "This paper will..."
8. Have a conclusion that "wraps the paper up" and perhaps even puts the question in a new light or at a higher level.
9. Do not use "I", "we", "you", etc. Do not use "etc."
10. Avoid incomplete sentences.
11. Use a consistent verb tense. For historical papers, stick with the simple past.
12. Have someone *proofread* your paper for spelling errors and silly errors.
-common words that give students problems:
it's - its
loose - lose
lead - led
there - their
13. *Footnotes*: use any accepted form, but be consistent.
14. Have a complete and properly presented bibliography (if applicable).