1. About
A book review tells not only what a book is about, but also how successfully the book explains itself. Professors often assign book reviews as practice in careful, analytical reading.

As a reviewer, you bring together the two strands of accurate, analytical reading and strong, personal response when you indicate what the book is about and what it might mean to a reader (by explaining what it meant to you). In other words, reviewers answer not only the what but the so what question about a book. Thus, in writing a review, you combine the skills of describing what is on the page, analyzing how the book tried to achieve its purpose, and expressing your own reactions.

2. Reading the Book
As you are reading or preparing to write the review, ask yourself these questions:

What are the author’s viewpoint and purpose? Are they appropriate? The viewpoint or purpose may be implied rather than stated, but often a good place to look for what the author says about his or her purpose and viewpoint is the introduction or preface.

What are the author’s main points? Again, these will often be stated in the introduction.

What kind of evidence does the author use to prove his or her points? Is the evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does the author support his or her points adequately?

How does this book relate to other books on the same topic? Is the book unique? Does it add new information? What group of readers, if any, would find this book most useful?
3. Writing the Book Review

Book reviews generally include the following kinds of information; keep in mind, though, that you may need to include other information to explain your assessment of a book.

Most reviews start off with a heading that includes all the bibliographic information about the book. If your assignment sheet does not indicate which form you should use, you can use the following:

Title. Author. Place of publication: publisher, date of publication. Number of pages.

Like most pieces of writing, the review itself usually begins with an introduction that lets your readers know what the review will say. The first paragraph usually includes the author and title again, so your readers don’t have to look up to find this information. You should also include a very brief overview of the contents of the book, the purpose or audience for the book, and your reaction and evaluation.

You should then move into a section of background information that helps place the book in context and discusses criteria for judging the book. Next, you should give a summary of the main points of the book, quoting and paraphrasing key phrases from the author.

Finally, you get to the heart of your review—your evaluation of the book. In this section, you might discuss some of the following issues:

- how well the book has achieved its goal
- what possibilities are suggested by the book
- what the book has left out
- how the book compares to others on the subject
- what specific points are not convincing
- what personal experiences you’ve had related to the subject.

It is important to use labels to carefully distinguish your views from the author’s, so that you don’t confuse your reader.

Then, like other essays, you can end with a direct comment on the book, and tie together issues raised in the review in a conclusion.

There is, of course, no set formula, but a general rule of thumb is that the first one-half to two-thirds of the review should summarize the author’s main ideas and at least one-third should evaluate the book. Check with your instructor.

4. Example

Below is a review of Taking Soaps Seriously by Michael Intintoli, written by Ruth Rosen in the Journal of Communication. Note that Rosen begins with a context for Intintoli’s book, showing how it is different from other books about soap operas. She finds a strength in the kind of details that his methodology enables him to see. However, she disagrees with his choice of case study. All in all, Rosen finds Intintoli’s book most useful for novices, but not one that advances our ability to critique soap operas very much.

Taking Soaps Seriously: The World of Guiding Light.

Ever since the U.S. public began listening to radio soaps in the 1930s, cultural critics have explored the content, form, and popularity of daytime serials. Today, media critics take a variety of approaches. Some explore audience response and find that, depending on sex, race, or even nationality, people “decode” the same story in different ways. Others regard soaps as a kind of subversive form of popular culture that supports women’s deepest grievances. Still others view the soap as a “text” and attempt to “deconstruct” it, much as a literary critic dissects a work of literature. Michael Intintoli’s project is somewhat different. For him, the soap is a cultural product mediated and created by corporate interests. It is the production of soaps, then, that is at the center of his Taking Soaps Seriously.

To understand the creation of soap operas, Intintoli adopted an ethnographic methodology that required a rather long siege on the set of “Guiding Light.” Like a good anthropologist, he picked up a great deal about the concerns and problems that drive the production of a daily soap opera. For the novice there is much to be learned here...