

GUIDELINES FOR A BOOK CRITIQUE

I. A book critique is a concise summary and evaluation of the book

The material should be printed, and double-spaced. It should not be more than five pages in length.

II The book critique is to include (a) the bibliographical entry, (b) content summary, and (c) an evaluation.

A. Bibliographical Entry

Example, single author:

Krentz, Edgar. *The Historical-Critical Method*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Example, book, edition other than the first:

Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

See the Turabian form and style manual for other examples of bibliography forms.

B. Content Summary

This section should be no more than three pages in length. The first sentence should be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible. Summarize the book in one sentence. The remainder of the summary will then be an elaboration of this sentence, sharing your understanding of what the book is all about.

Be sure the summary covers the entire book. Do not be so detailed about the first part of the book that subsequent sections are not adequately dealt with. To avoid this problem, organize the summary carefully and logically. Also, do not get bogged down in specifics. The task is to summarize the entire book, not to focus on selected details.

C. Evaluation

The evaluation is the most crucial part of the critique. This is not a summary of the book's content but a critical evaluation of what the author has to say. React to the book both positively and negatively.

First of all, remember that there are two main purposes behind a critique: 1. to demonstrate that you have read the book; and 2. to engage thoughtfully with its contents and note strengths and weaknesses. Do bear in mind that, when discussing weaknesses, the difficulty of the book is not a weakness. A graduate school course should have texts which stretch and challenge the mind.

Begin by *carefully* reading the introduction. Often, the introduction will present a good and logical summary of what the book is about. In theology, writers are attempting to present the truths of the Christian faith in a way that is logical. This does not mean that our limited minds can understand all of theology—much of it is a mystery, because it refers to a Supreme Being far greater than we are.

But it is very important to understand the writer's reasoning. Why does she or he take a given position? How does the writer relate the various ideas together? Some books can be difficult to grasp. I remember in college writing a term paper on Paul Tillich's doctrine of justification. He is very abstract. I recall sitting at a table, staring at two pages of Tillich for what seemed like an hour, trying to figure out what he was up to. Sometimes you have to fight your way through a book to figure it out. Maybe carry on an argument with the writer in the margins.

Finally, be grammatically correct. Microsoft Word will underline words or phrases or sentences that are incorrect. Sometimes, if you click on that portion, you will get an analysis or suggestion. If need be, have a colleague read over your paper and make suggestions.