How to Write a Book Review  
Rev. Michael Fahey, S.J.

All book reviews should be single spaced on one page (review articles are just that, articles); you can cite page numbers in parentheses if you use any direct references to the text. While most journals follow the guidelines presented below, pay attention to any unique requirements they may ask of you.

1. List all bibliographic information at the top of the page: i.e., author (or editor), title, place of publication, publisher, year, number of pages, price.

2. First paragraph: Indicate the context of the book: i.e., what studies have preceded this text on the same topic? Tell how this particular study contributes to the field of scholarship.

3. Second paragraph: describe the thesis (or main argument) of the book in the context of the previous paragraph.

4. Third paragraph: describe briefly the structure or contents of the book—i.e., try to show the logical development of the thesis in the structure of the text.

5. What kinds of sources are used? What is the principle of selection?

6. Identify pertinent ideas or themes that run through the text.

7. Identify strengths of the text.

8. Identify its weaknesses.

9. Do you recommend the book or not? And, if you recommend the book, for whom (undergraduates, graduates, general audience, etc.)? For what purposes could the book be utilized? At what level of study (introductory classes, advanced classes, research, etc.)?

10. Does it have an index and/or a detailed table of contents? i.e., is it easily useful as a research resource? Librarians use book reviews to determine their purchases for the library collection and appreciate details like this.

Writing book reviews is an underrated academic exercise, but a valuable one for those at the beginning of an academic career. It is great practice for concise writing. If you have developed basic expertise in an area of study, you can contact journals you read regularly and volunteer your services as a reviewer.