How to Write a Book Review
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The purpose of the book review is threefold: (1) to ensure that students read the book and are prepared to engage in intellectual discussion about it; (2) to prepare students to evaluate historical sources and arguments; and (3) to encourage independent and critical reading and thinking about historical sources. A book review should not summarize all of the information contained in the book. A book review is an overall critique of the book, its argument, its use of evidence and its contribution to historical understanding. It requires students to use analytical skills and pushes them to read and think about the book in a deeper manner, moving beyond a “book report.” Being able to ascertain the author’s argument and offering a critique of his/her use of sources are extremely important parts of the process.

Reading Critically & Note Taking
The key to reading critically is to formulate questions about your subject matter, to ensure that you are fully engaged, rather than merely skimming for main ideas. Rather than accepting everything contained in a book as the absolute truth, read critically by asking yourself questions as you read. Figure out the author’s main argument and then trace how he/she supports the argument through evidence and analysis. Then frame questions that test the validity of the author’s argument, analysis and sources. Pay close attention to the introductions and conclusions of chapters; in these sections, authors often reiterate their main ideas and establish links to other sections of the book. Also, remember that a critical view of a book does not necessarily mean negative; you can provide positive as well as negative insights and explanations.

Note taking is another important way to prepare for writing a solid, critical book review. It allows you to frame ideas in your own words and provokes independent thinking by removing you from the words of the author him/herself. Do not write down extensive notes regarding each aspect of the book. Be selective and make sure you are formulating your own explanation, not simply copying word for word the author’s ideas or writing down interesting and/or new facts. If there are particularly important direct quotes, note their location so you can find them again easily. If you do write down direct quotes, make sure that you designate them by quote marks, so when you are ready to write your review, you properly cite all information.

Key Elements of a Book Review
1. In your introduction you should provide the context for the book, i.e. the basic historical background of the period under study. Also, in the first paragraph, you must state both the thesis (main argument) of the author and your own thesis (did the author meet his/her purpose and prove his/her thesis?).
2. In the body of the paper, your book review must include the following, but you may place it in any order that works best:
   a. information on the author, his/her background, other publications, language abilities, biases, etc.
   b. a brief summary of the major ideas presented by the author. As a word of caution, do not spend the majority of your book review summarizing this information. It is more important to analyze and critique the ideas rather than only telling me what they were.
c. assessment of the argument made and the evidence used to support the argument. Think about answers to questions such as the following. Is the argument clearly stated? Is it clearly supported by the evidence? What kinds of evidence (sources) does the author rely on? Is this evidence comprehensive enough to support the author’s argument?

3. In your conclusion, please explain how this work adds to your historical understanding of the topic under discussion, whether or not it is valuable for adding insight, and if so, why, if not, why not?

The book review must be typed, double-spaced, with standard font size (11 or 12 point) and one inch margins. It must be no less than three full pages (750 words) and no more than five full pages (1,250 words) in length. For citations, if they are necessary, please use either footnotes or endnotes.