

**Writing a Scholarly, Critical Book Review
For the *International HETL Review***

Introduction

The book you choose to review must be approved by the Executive Editor and the Editor-in-Chief of the HETL Review. The book you write about should be directly related to the topic of teaching and learning in higher education. The topic of the book should be innovative and clearly present new information that advances the scholarship and practice of teaching and learning in higher education. What benefit does the book topic provide to the higher education community? How does the book contribute to the field of teaching and learning? Does the book offer something innovative and unique?

The topic may be very general or very specific but the information presented in the book should, ideally, be applicable to a wide range of disciplines in academia and the topic should be applicable across different cultural and national settings. In other words, the book should address a topic that has universal appeal and applicability. The book does not only have to be about pedagogy or a new learning technology or policy issues or leadership approaches. For instance, the book could be on the topic of statistics but the book should clearly offer some new benefits to those in higher education (e.g., the book could help undergraduate or graduate students engaged in research projects who have numeracy challenges because it presents statistics in a more intuitive and easy to understand way than traditional textbooks).

Step 1: Develop a good conceptual understanding of the book

Pay special attention to the Title, the Table of Contents, and Preface as well as any Forward or Introduction by the editor or other writer. These sections will often give you a good idea of the central idea and perspective of the book.

Be sure to read the entire text to gain a deep understanding of what the author is writing about. Please do not just skim the text and then try to write of cursory summary of what you skimmed. Rather, be sure to invest an appropriate amount of time to provide a scholarly, critical review the book.

Having said that however, the first and final chapters are often the most important so be sure to read those two chapters most carefully. The first chapter is usually the chapter where the author lays out the theoretical or conceptual framework for the book. The final chapter is usually where the author presents the conclusions and the reasons why those conclusions were reached.

Be sure to gain an overall understanding of the book: who, what, why, and how – who the book was written for (target audience), why it was written (purpose), what the book's main points are (thesis), and how the book convinces the reader (argument).

Step 2: Decide the most salient points of the book to discuss in your review

As you read the book, write down notes that highlight the most salient points of the book. What is the book's theoretical approach? What are the research or analytical methods used? Does the author provide case studies, examples, and interpretation of factual evidence? What is the line of argumentation used to



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convince the reader? Is the author's logic and reasoning sound? What is the style of presentation and writing? Does the author provide a range of evidence of support his/her thesis and does he/she make a convincing argument?

If necessary, read other articles or reviews or comments (e.g., Amazon) of the book to see other readers' views. Search other sources or use Google search to find comments or other reviews on the book that will help support your own conclusions and give you a more holistic understanding of the book.

Step 3: Develop a clear and coherent structure for the review article

For books where all chapters are written by the same author(s), the review should be between 1,500 and 2,000 words. For edited books where each chapter is written by a different author, the review can be extended up to 2,500 words. For all reviews, please use the following, suggested structure and use APA formatting and referencing.

Overview

Identify the book author(s) or editor(s), title, edition, publication date, and publisher, briefly describe the main contents of the book, the main argument of the book, the main points of the book that will be reviewed, and briefly state the purpose of the review.

Review

This section should be about two-thirds (2/3) of the paper. It is often best *not* to give a simple chapter by chapter summary of the book. Rather, provide a critical and scholarly explanation of the top two or three or four key issues, concepts, or points discussed in the book. This part of the review is the core of your review. Clearly explain the author's argument before evaluating it. Be sure to support your critique with evidence from the book or other sources. What are the merits of the book – its strengths and possible weaknesses? Please be sure to be civil and gracious in your analysis of your book. *Remember, how would you want someone to review a book that you wrote?*

Conclusion

Assess and explain the overall contribution the book has made to your understanding of the topic. How important is the book to the development of new knowledge in the book's field or discipline? Finally, provide a reference list or bibliography of the sources you referred to.

Step 4: Review and edit your article before submitting

After you have completed a final draft of the review article, be sure you have corrected any spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting errors. With respect to comprehension and cogency, put yourself in the shoes of another reader and ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the article clearly explain why the topic is important to the higher education community?
- Does the article clearly explain what contribution(s) the book makes?



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- Is the article clear and coherent throughout and free of overly technical jargon or idiomatic expressions (e.g., figures of speech) or humor that will not translate across cultures?
- Is there a logical progression and flow to the development of the article?
- Is the critique and analysis fair and balanced?
- Does the article make a convincing argument?
- Is the article engaging and interesting?

When you are satisfied with your review article, please send it to Krassie Petrova at Krassie.petrova@aut.ac.nz