The Academic Librarians' Guide to the Craft of Writing Book Reviews

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WHY WRITE BOOK REVIEWS?
• Book reviews are an excellent collection development tool
• Provide free promotion and branding opportunities for your library
• In certain academic libraries, they can count as scholarship toward reaching tenure
• They keep you actively reading and writing
• They keep you up-to-date with the most recent trends and developments in the field
• It provides a way for a librarian to “give back” professionally
• Great tool for early career librarians
• One can learn how to publish without the anxiety of publishing “research”

WHERE CAN I FIND VENUES TO WRITE BOOK REVIEWS?
• Check out the submissions policies for notable reviewing venues (Library Journal, Choice, and Kirkus, just to name a few) or scholarly journals
• Library Writer’s Blog – librarywriting.blogspot.com
• Get solicited to write a review by a scholarly journal or magazine
• Join a group or a professional organization that publishes reviews on specific topics that are of interest to you

HELPFUL TIPS FOR WRITING GREAT REVIEWS
• KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE
• Closely follow your review publication’s guidelines for word count and style
• Try to account for the material in the item being reviewed without summarizing too heavily
• Be honest: If you do not think the item under review is very good, do not be artificially positive
• KNOW YOUR VENUE (will it accept or permit harsh assessments, humor, scholarly or more broadly accessible prose, popular culture references, or political points of view)
• Have some fun – it’s rare to get the chance to write professionally with such creativity

THE ART OF WRITING BOOK REVIEWS
• Book Reviews Can Be an Effective Outlet for Creative, Analytic, and Editorial Expression Within the Profession
• Concise review forums require maximum focus with minimal verbiage
• Long-form forums allow for a more thorough exploration of a text, but can require restraint
• Positive reviews: Is there a thin line between a glowing review and gushing, effusive praise?
• Negative reviews: At what point do harsh assessments become mean, petty, or hostile?
• Freedom of expression: How does one navigate between personal opinion, institutional representation, and professional decorum?
• Is there a place for witty remarks, wordplay, allusions, or cleverness in review-writing?
• Practice makes perfect … or pretty good, at the very least

Library Journal’s reviews are typically 200 words or less

Long-form, like this one, are more time-intensive but provide extra value to the audience:

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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