
Elements for Basic Reviews

*A Guide for Writers
and Readers of
Reviews of Works
in All Mediums
and Genres*

*Developed by the Materials Reviewing
Committee of the Collection Develop-
ment and Evaluation Section (CODES).
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Editor's Note: The full-text of this document (forty-five pages) is available on the RUSA Web site at www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaprotocols/referenceguide/ElementsforReviews.pdf. The introduction and the table of contents are reprinted here.

This is the first edition of a new online document developed by the RUSA CODES Materials Reviewing Committee in 2003–2004. Its primary purpose is to guide librarians who wish to become reviewers on the elements that make up a good review; in addition, it warns them about elements to avoid. Its secondary purpose is to help library selectors recognize elements that define a good review. Finally, it may serve the needs of authors and publishers by demonstrating how reviews in professional library trade journals are written. For all three audiences, it offers an overview into the reviewing process.

Reviews serve multiple purposes for library selectors, publishers, authors, students, and scholars. Library selectors use reviews to make informed decisions concerning the potential usefulness of an item for their clientele, to compare like items, to choose one item over another (or to choose not to purchase an item), and to justify the purchase and defend the appropriateness of an item for a library collection. Reviews in some publications (such as *Library Journal*) are written for a library audience; the purpose of such reviews is not only to evaluate the quality of a specific item but also to assess how it may fit into an academic, public, school, or special library collection. Selectors may also use reviews for readers' advisory and for program planning (such as book or film clubs). Publishers and authors may use reviews to promote sales, to improve existing products, and to develop future products. Scholars and students may use reviews to track and evaluate publishing trends as well as related cultural and social changes.

Reviewers should be qualified to judge the reliability and validity of facts presented in materials that they evaluate, to compare such materials to similar works, and to determine whether such materials provide a greater understanding of a specific subject. Consequently, reviewers should have a solid academic background and strong personal or professional interest in the subject of the materials examined. Fiction reviewers should have an extensive background or a keen interest in literature.

Reviewers need to schedule sufficient time and obtain appropriate equipment (such as a CD player for music recordings or a DVD player for films) to examine and write about materials. Reviewers must adhere to deadlines and inform the editor immediately if a deadline cannot be met. Some journals

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publish reviews of materials prior to their publication; such reviews normally require quick turn-around time (often two or three weeks). Prior to publication, some materials may lack graphics, indexes, or other elements and reviewers need to indicate what elements were unavailable for examination.

Reviewers should be sensitive to ethical issues regarding the practice of examining and evaluating materials. Reviewers should make every effort to provide an objective evaluation. Consequently, they should not review materials written by themselves, colleagues, or friends; they should also avoid reviewing materials if any financial stake is involved. A review should be submitted to only one publication.

Reviewers should be aware that each publication has its own guidelines, requirements, and audience for reviews. Editors of some publications request that potential contributors submit a sample review. It is unusual for reviewers to receive monetary compensation, but they are often permitted to keep materials they have reviewed.

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