

TEMPLATES FOR WRITING REVIEWS

These templates are really suggested directions for you. They quite bare because I want to encourage you to use your own words. I'll share examples you can look up on Amazon.

If you totally draw a blank, find reviewers with high rankings and memberships in Amazon Vine. Look up their reviews. You'll find many ways to write good reviews and you can adopt many of them for your own target market.

Template #1 : Good (or Great) non-fiction book with some flaws

**Example: My review of Po Bronson's book,
What Should I Do With My Life**

<http://whatnext.notlong.com>

[Author's name] presents a book about [....].

[Brief summary of the book, in your own words. 2-3 paragraphs tops.]

[Explain the book's genre: memoir, fiction, self-help. Discuss whether the book fits the category closely. For example, Po Bronson's book looks like a self-help career book, but it's actually a journalistic account of a phenomenon. A few sentences unless you have an exceptional situation.]

Middle section:

[The books strengths are....] Discuss the books strength in 2-3 paragraphs. Give examples.

The book does have a few flaws: Summarize the flaws. Then devote one or more paragraphs to each flaw. For example:

"Smith's book on gardening does have two flaws: it's targeting a narrow audience and it assumes some knowledge most basic gardeners won't have."

Then you would include at least a paragraph on each flaw. .

Conclusion

Despite these few flaws, the book presents an excellent overview of gardening for the beginner. It is especially recommended as a gift book for teens who are just getting started with their own gardens.

Two or three takeaways

Optional (if you loved the book): Highly recommended.

Template #2: The Rave

A rave review has to be fairly short or you lose credibility. It's also important to personalize your review, writing in first person, so you

**Example: Jesse Kornbluth's Review:
The Art of Racing In the Rain by Garth Stein**

Opening: Explain what was so great about the book.

Often you can begin by explaining that you don't normally read this genre or you don't usually like books written by dogs.

Introduction: Briefly summarize the book. If others have already summarized the plot or book, you can just say, "Others have summarized the plot details so I will just jump in..."

Middle: List attributes of the book that made it great. Then include a paragraph or so about each attribute. For example, Kornbluth said the characters, the situation and the story were all appealing.

The conclusion: Share your overall perception and tell us who should buy the book. Close with a reference to the reader.

Template #3: A thoughtful, critical review

Example: Review by J. Lesley: *Walking Through Walls* by Phillip Smith

I liked the book myself but I also liked this critical review. The only thing missing was a reference to the reviewer's experience and credentials. For instance, he could have said, "I am a traditional left-brained skeptic. I have a lot of positive experience with traditional medical systems."

Critical reviews tend to be longer than raves because you have to show that you're being fair. A short, sharp critical review will come across as a bash.

Introduction: Give readers a context. Why did you pick up this book? You need to clarify that you did (or did not) have a bias at the outset. In particular, share anything that led you to believe you would like the book.

Middle:

Summarize the negatives: What bothered you about the book? J. Lesley was disturbed by the book's content. He criticizes the judgment of the author's parents. He questions the accuracy of the author's memories.

If you're looking for sharper structure, identify 3 qualities that bothered you about the book. Spend at least one paragraph on each.

Tip: If you're an expert in your own right, here's a chance to shine. For example, a psychic reader might comment on Smith's memoir: "As a practicing psychic myself, I found..."

Or if you're a scientist or medical professional, you might write, "As a physician's assistant, I found Smith's descriptions of medical cures to be [fill in your own words: realistic? Absurd?]. I have never heard of a doctor who falsely diagnosed cancer from a radiology report..."

Or you could say the opposite: “The reports of medical care ring true. However, I doubt that a layman with a pendulum could produce these results, based on my first-hand experience as...”

Positives: Try to find at least one or two redeeming features and discuss them briefly.

Conclusion: Report your main reaction to the book. If appropriate, you could express disappointment that you couldn't offer a more positive review: “I really liked the author. I wanted to like this book. I hope his next book will create a different reading experience.”

Conclude with a statement that connects with the reader.

Template #4: Complimentary but realistic.

Michael Port's book, *Book Yourself Solid*. Read my review.

This review was one of my favorites. I was thrilled to get so many "helpful" votes.

The reviews for this book (and the comments) represent a wide range of reviews. The fact that so many people liked my review demonstrates that readers want even-handed, detailed discussions. That's why you have to decide if you're writing for authors or readers when you are reviewing.

Writing this review:

Open with a statement of how you found the book. Include disclaimers about your experience with the author. Summarize your overall view of the book.

Middle: This part should be fairly long, if you want to be fair. Discuss both strong and weak point of the book.

You gain extra credibility when you refer to specific page numbers or chapters.

Conclusion: Your conclusion should be an even handed summary. If you're not comfortable giving a broad "buy now" recommendation, usually you can come up with a statement like, "A good audience for this book would be...."

Template #5: Experiential Review

In this type of review you can be as creative as you like. Draw on your experience. Write a review that parodies or draws on the book's style. These reviews can be fun to read and tend to get many "helpful" votes. You can't use this style too often.

Natalie Goldberg's book, *Old Friends From Far Away*. Read Julie Jordan Scott's review.

Julie Jordan Scott relates the book to her own life and experience, vividly. She does this in many of her reviews. You can contrast her approach with my 4-star review of the same book (and notice Scott's subtle comments about another reviewer).

This style would work well for other coaches and practitioners. You introduce the book. The reader watches as you guide them through the chapters.

Sharp Teeth by Toby Barlow. is a novel written in free verse. I didn't read or review it, but Jesse Kornbluth wrote a review in the style of the book, very successfully!

Until Proven Innocent, reviewed by Danusha Goska (Bloomington, IN) – The book tells the story of the Duke lacrosse players who were accused of raping a dancer. Goska wrote a positive review – a little general but clearly viewed through her feminist, academic lens. The last paragraph of her review is quite powerful. That's what makes the review effective and memorable.