

Columbia Bible College Library

Library Resource Guides

Book Reviews

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A. How to write your own book Review:

1. Examine the Book Carefully

Ask questions like: How is the author qualified for this topic? What is the book’s main purpose? How is the book organized? What is unusual about this book? Is the subject, method, or procedure unusual?

2. Read the Book Reflectively

Try to understand the big picture of the book as you are reading. How is it all fitting together? Does it all fit together? Are there pieces omitted? Do the arguments given make sense?

3. Write the Review Systematically

- **Introduction.** Place the book information in bibliographic entry format at the top of the page and include total number of pages in parentheses: Smith, Rachel. Romans: A New Approach. New York: Harper, 1993. (232 pp.). The introduction itself should place the book within a subject area and provide a snapshot of the book’s purpose. For example:

While there are many commentaries written on the book of Romans, most follow the same basic format. Rachel Smith, however, in Romans: A New Approach, explores how Romans often mimics phrases from the Septuagint which provide key interpretive clues for understanding the text. Her purpose is to “identify the literary links in order to unravel some of the knotty problems in traditional interpretations of the book of Romans” (3).

- **Summary.** This section should provide a brief overview of the book’s method, structure, overall message, and target audience. It should be clear that you are very familiar with the book. Explain the structure and key points for each section of the book.
- **Evaluation.** Here is the heart of the review where you evaluate whether the book actually accomplishes its purpose and makes a useful contribution to its field. Normally, you should start off with some strengths of the book. Does it make a complicated subject clear to the average reader? Does it do something that other books do not? Is it exceptionally well organized or well researched? Then, you should reflect on weaknesses. Does it accomplish what it claims to accomplish? Does it argue its points convincingly? Does it take into account all the other research that is in the relevant field? In this section, you should refer to specific pages and chapters in the book to support what you are arguing.
- **Response.** Not all reviews include this section, so check with the instructor. Here you have an opportunity to reflect more personally about the book’s impact on you. For the first time in the review you have the freedom to use “I”. How has your thinking about the subject changed because of this book?
- **Conclusion and Recommendation.** Briefly close off the review by referring back to the introduction and providing a recommendation of the book for a certain audience—if the book deserves a recommendation (e.g., “Smith’s study of Romans certainly does provide an innovative approach and probably should be a must read for all serious students. However, most readers will find it far too technical and complicated for devotional reading. In spite of this, it makes a worthy contribution to the field of NT studies”).

Other “how to” guides

- [How to Write a Book Review](http://www.ats.wilmore.ky.us/dmin/curr_std/book_rev.htm), by Joel B. Green and Brent A. Strawn, Asbury Theological Seminary. (http://www.ats.wilmore.ky.us/dmin/curr_std/book_rev.htm)
- [Dalhousie University Libraries: How to Write a Book Review](http://www.library.dal.ca/how/bookrev.htm) - Both critical and descriptive book reviews are covered. (<http://www.library.dal.ca/how/bookrev.htm>)
- [University of Saskatchewan Library](http://library.usask.ca/ref/howto/example_review.html) - Annotated Example of a Book Review. (http://library.usask.ca/ref/howto/example_review.html)
- [ENG 252 Survey of World Literature II Course Information Page](http://tncc.vccs.edu/faculty/longt/eng252/eng252info.htm) – example of a book review. (<http://tncc.vccs.edu/faculty/longt/eng252/eng252info.htm>)

B. Finding a Book Review

Why use a book review? It may:

- help you to understand a book better
- help you to see how others have evaluated a certain book
- summarize the plot and analyze themes and symbols
- summarize a controversial debate
- compare the book with similar books
- may give biographical information about the author

Steps to finding a book review

1. Have the necessary information. This includes:

- Author's full name
- Full title of book
- The year the book was *first* published. Check the back of the title page for this information or check the library catalogue.

2. Look in an appropriate "journal article" database that includes book reviews.

For reviews of scholarly theological books: Go to the [CBC Library webpage \(www.columbiabc.edu/library/\)](http://www.columbiabc.edu/library/). Click on [Journal Articles](#)

[ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials](#)

Type keywords of book title (in quotations) and author's surname

To limit your results: click on **Review** at Publication Type

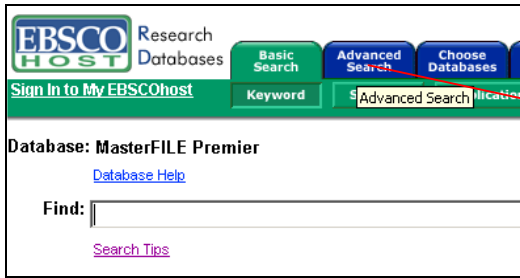
For reviews of scholarly books on religion and theology, Go to the [CBC Library webpage \(www.columbiabc.edu/library/\)](http://www.columbiabc.edu/library/). Click on [Journal Articles](#)

[Proquest Religion Database](#)

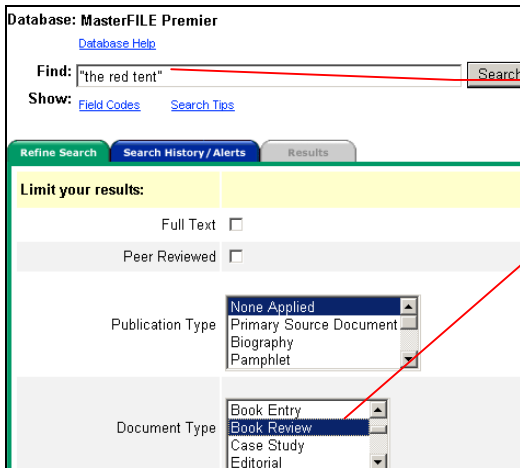
Type keywords of book title (in quotations) and author's surname

For reviews of books on general topics, Go to the [CBC Library webpage \(www.columbiabc.edu/library/\)](http://www.columbiabc.edu/library/). Click on [Journal Articles](#)

Ebscohost Fulltext - databases via FRASER VALLEY REGIONAL LIBRARY - (excellent for general topics, psychology, OL, ECE, QUEST). A collection of full-text magazine databases providing keyword access to over 3,000 magazines and journals. To access these databases, you will need to be a registered patron of the Fraser Valley Regional Library. Click on the link once again, enter your name, Fraser Valley Regional Library Card # and PIN number.



Click on ADVANCED SEARCH



Type title of book

For document type, click on "Book Review"

For reviews of Canadian books, Go to the [CBC Library webpage](http://www.columbiabc.edu/library/) (www.columbiabc.edu/library/). Click on [Journal Articles](#)

BCA - Reference Fulltext - database via FRASER VALLEY REGIONAL LIBRARY (excellent for general topics, psychology, OL, ECE, QUEST). This collection provides in depth access to a wide diversity of Canadian periodicals, ranging from academic titles to special interest publications to general magazines. To access this database, you will need to be a registered patron of the Fraser Valley Regional Library. Click on the link once again, enter your name, Fraser Valley Regional Library Card # and PIN number.

Other web sites that include book reviews:

- [Books & Culture: A Christian Review](http://www.christianitytoday.com/books/) - Includes searchable archive and links. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/books/>)
- [BookPage](http://www.bookpage.com/archive.html) - monthly book reviews with a mix of author interviews on the month's noteworthy new releases. (<http://www.bookpage.com/archive.html>)
- [New York Review of Books](http://www.nybooks.com/archives/) - features book reviews, essays, and poems covering politics, literary criticism and art. Includes searchable archive and links (<http://www.nybooks.com/archives/>)
- [Review of Biblical Literature](http://www.bookreviews.org/) -includes searchable archive. (<http://www.bookreviews.org/>)

If you would like help or further suggestions for research, please ask the librarian for assistance