A book review provides an evaluation of a book, and by the end of it the reader should know:

- The bibliographic details of the book (author, date, title, publisher information, price)
- A summary of what the book is about – what it focuses on and what approach it takes (e.g. style, format/layout, target audience)
- Whether it is worth reading (and why)

Figure 1: Screenshot of a book review (approximately 1400 words long) [http://www.ajaonline.org/online-review-book/1824](http://www.ajaonline.org/online-review-book/1824) Accessed 17 June 2014
Where do book reviews appear?

- Specialist academic journals usually have a section dedicated to book reviews (sometimes in each issue; sometimes in a special annual issue). These may also be accessible online without a log-in. These are likely to be the most appropriate reviews to use when researching and writing academic assignments.
- Broadsheet newspapers – often in weekend sections e.g. Guardian Review (Saturdays)
- Magazines will often carry reviews (sometimes these are very short)

Keeping up to date with publications and reviews

Studying Effectively provides details on monitoring publisher alerts and other online indexes so that you can keep up with new publications and reviews.
What types of book reviews are there?

- Summary reviews – especially in popular mainstream magazines, these usually just provide a synopsis (sometimes based on a publisher or author’s press release) and possibly some opinion comments

- Short reviews (500-800 words) – these usually include a summary of the book with some limited critical commentary and are likely to be included in broadsheet newspapers and some specialist journals

- Longer review pieces (1000-1500 words) – these usually provide a more in-depth review of a significant publication in the discipline

- Review essays (2000 words or longer) – some publications will review a selection of books on a single theme, critiquing their contribution to the topic through evaluation of comparative strengths and weaknesses. These may have been published to coincide with an anniversary or relevant contemporary events.

Why are book reviews worth reading?

- They can provide an overview of (new) publications in your subject area – it helps keep you up-to-date about your subject so you can select where there is value in you carrying out more in-depth reading of particular books
  - Do remember that reviews may have been accepted for publication around 18 months in advance, depending on the regularity of publication. Books are first received and distributed to suitable reviewers; the review is checked for suitability for publication by the book review editor; and finally the review is scheduled into an issue.

- Book reviews can provide an overview of (new) publications in connected areas related to your subject
  - Keeping up to date with reviews can be a good way to put your specialist subject knowledge into the broader context – what is going on in related areas that may have an impact on your topic?

- Reading two or three reviews in appropriate academic publications may give you a good understanding of the book itself

WARNINGS
Reviews are not always ‘correct’. Reviewers may not always recognise the value of a new type of study in a discipline, or they may demonstrate prejudices or preferences in their reviewing style.

Reading book reviews should not be a substitute for reading a book but may help you focus your reading strategies and help you in understanding the basics of the book’s ideas/arguments.
Writing a book review

Have you included...

- Clear bibliographic details
- A note about the author and how/why they are qualified to write on this topic (their job role/title; their areas of academic expertise)
- Summary of the author’s main ideas or argument
  - Ask yourself: Does the author have a particularly strong view/bias?
- Overview of the book and its purpose
  - Does the title (with any subtitle) clearly convey and/or engage with the book’s content?
  - Is it a new edition of an earlier text? Has it been updated (and, if so, how extensively)?
  - Is it a facsimile edition? Does the preface or introduction provide sufficient context for the content?
- Identification of the target audience/readership (General public? First year undergraduates? Postgraduate researchers? Experts in ....?)
  - What is the writing style? (Approachable? Dominated by jargon or specialist terminology? Suitable to the intended audience?)
  - Does the layout of the book work effectively? (Division of chapters, length of paragraphs/sentences, use of appropriate visual material, size and choice of font?)
- Discussion on how well the book covers what it sets out to discuss
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the book?
  - If visual material is included, does it add to the book (are there sufficient illustrations?)
- Comparison to other significant publications on the topic (The depth of comment on this may depend on the length of the review)
- A personal comment from the reviewer on whether the book is worth reading. (Do not make it a personal attack)