



Writing a Book Review

By Vanessa Finaughty
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What is the purpose of a review?

While many authors, particularly indie (self-published) authors, eagerly await the next review of their books, the purpose is not to stroke the author's ego (or put them down). *A review is written for readers and no one else.* A review is intended to give enough information and opinions about the book *to enable readers to make an informed decision* as to whether or not it's the type of book they might enjoy.

What should a review contain?

🔥 Brief description of the plot – there's no need to go into great detail here; that's what the back cover blurb is for. However, many readers may not have the blurb in front of them, so it's important to have a few lines that sum up the plot.

🔥 Genre – tell the reader what genre the book is. If they don't like fantasy, for example, they won't read it regardless. However, if you think non-fantasy readers might enjoy it anyway, tell them why. If it's different to standard fantasy, tell readers how.

🔥 Anything you believe some readers won't want to read – nothing is worse than purchasing a book based on a good review, only to discover that it's full of topics, scenes and ideas that make you cringe. That type of disappointment may earn the author a bad review from the purchaser. Does the book have a rape scene? Include that in your review, as some readers may not want to read that. Is that same scene tastefully written and does it further the plot or character development? Tell readers that, too. Keep in mind, as a reviewer, that not everyone will share your opinions and dislikes, so don't slam a book because the main character is immoral, for example, although you can mention his/her lack of morals in the review.

🔥 *Your opinion* and a little something about the book that cannot be gleaned from the back cover blurb – this could be anything, including a character you particularly liked or disliked, the various plot elements or author's humour – all the things that stood out, either in a positive or negative light.

🔥 Tell readers at the end of the review what type of person would enjoy the book. Teenagers? Adults only? Everyone? Fantasy lovers? Horror lovers? People who like a good laugh? If you think some people won't enjoy the book, mention that and *give reasons* so readers will know immediately if what bothers you would bother them.

🔥 Tell the reader if there's character development or not.

🔥 If you've read the author's other books, compare the books' themes or characters, if relevant.



- 🔥 Tell the reader if the story is: fast paced, slow paced, full of action, more of a philosophical read or drama, original in your opinion, full of violence or sex, and if the characters are realistic and whether or not you could relate to them, etc.
- 🔥 Tell the reader if the book's cover fits the story in your opinion.
- 🔥 If the book or parts thereof affected you in some way, share that with the reader.

Please note that it's not necessary to include *all* of the above in a review, and that the above is *not* an extensive list.

What should a review *not* contain?

- 🔥 Sarcasm.
- 🔥 Author bashing. You are reviewing the book, not the author.
- 🔥 Rudeness, which includes comments like 'this sucks' or 'a waste of time' – if you think the book is *that* bad, find kinder words to say so, and *give reasons*. *Reasons are vital* because some readers may not agree with you *if they know why* you dislike something. From the author's side, reasons for dislike may help them to improve future writing, if your logic is solid and they agree with it. Many will even publish a new version of the book, in which your dislikes have been done away with.
- 🔥 Spoilers. If you enjoyed the book and write a review, part of the purpose of that review is to help the author sell extra copies. You cannot do this if you give away things the author has revealed slowly as you read. Why would anyone buy the book if they already know all the exciting stuff?
- 🔥 Something negative without at least *one* positive comment. Most of us can find at least one likable thing in any story. Mention that in the review, especially if the rest of your views are negative. Someone might purchase the book anyway, purely due to that one positive comment. Remember: you are not trying to sway readers to read or not read the book; you are telling them what you thought of the book, and what they can expect from the book, so that they can then make *a more informed* personal decision to buy or not buy.

Please note that the above is *not* an extensive list.

What if I hate the book so much I can't find a single nice thing to say?

Unless you've agreed to review, this one's easy: just don't review. Whatever you write, it won't serve the purpose a review is intended to serve. **Nobody cares if you hated the book. They want to know if they will hate it.** Your reviews need to give them a good indication of that.

It's also quite possible to soften your tone and still say exactly what you want to. Without the 'I hate this' coming across, it once again becomes a review. To demonstrate this point, let me repeat what I said in red font above... **Remember: a review is intended to**



give potential readers an indication of what the book is about and whether or not *they're* likely to enjoy it. Doesn't that sound *so* much better than 'nobody cares what you think'?