Book Review Essay
The resource for portions of this handout is a website by Michelle Williams.

**Note:** The elements of a book review essay are determined by the professor; thus, follow the assignment’s instructions and review the book accordingly.

The purpose of a book review is to discuss the text and possibly raise an argument for or against its theme, contents, ideas, etc.

**Three basic portions of a book review are generally as follows:**

1. An introduction,
2. A summary of the book,
3. An interpretation of the book,
4. A conclusion by the reviewer concerning the **significance or meaning** of this argument for a wider audience

- **Book Review** versus **Book Report:** When writing a review essay, your main objective is to provide an overview of the most significant points that were raised by the author of a literary work. The review must engage a critical discussion of the literary work. A book report simply summarizes the work and provides a brief opinion on the story.

**Introduction:** The introduction identifies the main thesis of the work and previews a critical response.

**Summary:** The summary of your essay should clearly capture the main features of the book.

- Present the facts, events, ideas, and outcome of the book to your reader. You should remain objective.
- Focus only on central claims and arguments in the text. Review the information that is most significant and that will help lead into a critical discussion.
Stick to conveying the main issues of the book because what you say will be all the background your reader will have to use in following your arguments about the book.

**Note:** The length of your summary will depend upon the overall length of the paper. It is a large portion, but it should never be more than one third of the essay.

**Interpretation:** The interpretation should begin to analyze how and why the author has put his/her book together in the way he/she has.

- Read the work a second time. Take notes. Keep several questions in mind:
  1. What are the relationships between the facts, ideas, characters, and events in the book?
  2. How did you react to this combination, and why?
  3. Did the work please or anger you? (How was this effect achieved?)
  4. What was your revelation?

- Provide your own perspective on the book once the questions are resolved. Justify each claim.
- Evaluate the contribution the text has made to the discipline area in which it is written. Identify the book’s problems or controversies.

**Conclusion:** The conclusion brings together the summary and interpretation of your essay.

- Carefully compare what the author had to say (summary) with your own reaction (interpretation). In other words, restate your thesis and summarize your critical analysis.
- Generalize the meaning of the book for other people. (Say to yourself, “What else is there? What can be gained from the reading?)
- Reflect on the meaning of your own reaction at this point.
- This section is also known as the “So what?” portion of the essay, where you tell readers what the relevance or validity of the book is for them. (Relevance means the meaning it will have for persons concerned with other or similar problems; Validity means its objectivity or accuracy.)