

Sustaining an Argument
Book Reviews

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Sustaining an Argument Book Reviews

According to Vyhmeister “preparing a book review entails the following four things.

1. Reading
2. Taking notes
3. Evaluation what you have read
4. Writing out a summary, assessment and comments concerning the book or article.

The book review should also contain four main parts

1. A complete bibliographical entry
 - a. Include the number of pages in the book
 - b. Topic and/or problem addressed by the work in question.
2. Information regarding the author of the book
His or her academic training, position, and other books authored
 - a. Search the author to bring up his books, and reviews published.
 - b. The author’s qualifications and expertise they bring to the subject.
3. A summary of the book which should be no shorter than one paragraph or longer than two hundred words
 - a. The summary should synthesize the thrust of the book and its main arguments.
 - b. Do not distort the emphasis of the author.
 - c. As concisely as possible, summarize the book’s argument
 - d. Quote when possible directly
4. An evaluation of the book is often based on comparison.

Therefore when sustaining an argument one must be able to compare and point out with clarity the differences between two books or authors. In a book review you must always be careful to document the author’s statement and not merely paraphrase which may confuse and distort the ideas of the author. Even if in your review you disagree with that author, the article’s review should be courteous. The review should be a well-documented analysis and not an

‘emotional tirade.’ A well written review will stand out as a clear interpretation of what the author has actually conveyed whether you have agreed with them or not.

Vyhmeister lists a group of questions in her book to help you to ‘evaluate thinking and writing.’ When you review an article or book you should be able to examine its strengths and weaknesses in terms of what the book seeks to accomplish. In the matter of sustaining an argument, one must also consider what information is a fact verses opinion, and are those opinion supported.

As you engage in the review you must also consider in the evaluation if the information is biased and has the author successfully been persuasive to their audience. In her guide to ‘Writing Research Papers,’ Nancy Vyhmeister also states that “to evaluate content, you must be conversant with the topic.”¹

1. Nancy J. Vyhmeister and Terry D. Robertson, “Your Guide to Writing quality Research papers: For Students of Religion and Theology,” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), pg. 69