

# How to Compose a Book Review Article

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## ***Prewriting***

1. Select a book.
2. Clarify the assignment.
3. Read the book.
4. Collect pertinent material from inside and outside the book. (See handouts “Using the IDeA Heuristic to Develop a Book Review” and “Finding Material about Books for Book Review Assignments.”)

## ***Composing***

5. Organize notes and materials.
6. Compose a title (if required) and a bibliographic heading.
7. Compose the section identifying the purpose of the book (author, subject, and audience).
8. Compose descriptions of content: data, methodology, conclusions (summary may be used here if it is required).
9. Compose assessments of the “fit” in the field, the author’s presuppositions and biases, and the credibility of the work in its field.
10. Compose a recommendation or personal response appropriate to the professor’s requirement.

[Items 6-10 may be **composed** in any sequence, but are usually **presented** in the order given.]

## ***Revising***

11. Verify the purpose of your review.
12. Add, delete, or rearrange sections to adjust development or length.
13. Edit for sentence structure, flow, diction, and demons.
14. Verify the bibliographic heading for the book you are reviewing.
15. Verify the documentation of any sources you cite.
16. Spell check.
17. Proofread.
18. Produce a title page.
19. Produce a near-final copy.
20. Ask a friend to read the review.
21. Make corrections and changes, repeating steps 11-20 as time allows.
22. Produce a final copy.

**Finding Material about Books for Book Review Assignments**  
 (Keyed to the Levels of IDeA)  
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<u>IDeA Level</u>	<u>Inside the Book</u>	<u>Outside the Book</u>
1. <b>Identify</b> the purpose	Front matter Cover Preface Indexes Bibliographies	Encyclopedias Yearbooks, almanacs Subject bibliographies Biographical dictionaries
2. <b>Describe</b> the process	Text Headings Appendices Tables and Figures Indexes Bibliographies	Reviews, critiques
3. <b>Assess</b> the system of values	Subtext Connotation Tone, persona Citation clusters	Reviews, review articles Encyclopedias Book review indexes Citation indexes

## **IDeA: A Heuristic Model for Prewriting Critical Book Reviews**

Because professional book reviewing requires a level of analysis beyond summary, a systematic way to uncover aspects of the book being reviewed can be very helpful. Such a discovery method is called a “heuristic.” The model presented here combines research materials from James Moffett and from the team of Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike.

Moffett points out the triangular relation of author, audience, and subject. Young, Becker, and Pike have described the value of shifting one’s level of perspective on a subject to generate things to say about it: any subject can be viewed as a static item, a dynamic relation, or a complex system. A reviewer may identify the static features of the book, describe its processes, and ultimately assess its position in its field. From these three increasingly sophisticated levels of analysis, I derive the mnemonic acronym IDeA: identify, describe, and assess.

To begin with, the reviewer must identify the subject, the author, and the audience for the work. The triangle formed by these three components may be called “purpose.” Sources within the work for this identification are its front matter (cover, title page, table of contents, book jacket, prefatory remarks) and back matter (indexes, bibliographies). In the library, the reviewer may consult encyclopedias, yearbooks, almanacs, subject bibliographies, and biographical reference works.

At the intermediate or textual level, the reviewer must describe the data, the analysis of the data, and the conclusions drawn in the book. The triangle formed by these components may be called “process.” It is congruent with the top-level triangle because the subject supplies the data, the writer analyzes the data, and the audience is led to draw conclusions. Sources within the book for this analysis include the text itself, with headings, tables and figures, and appendices. Library tools are reviews and critiques.

At the deepest or subtextual level, the reviewer must assess the fit of the item in the subject literature of which it is a part, the biases or presuppositions of the author, and the credibility to the audience of the argument and presentation. The triangle formed by these three components may be labeled “value system.” Intratextual sources for this analysis include such subtextual features as connotation, tone, persona, and citation clusters. Appropriate library tools would be reviews, encyclopedias, subject bibliographies, book review indexes and digests, and citation indexes.

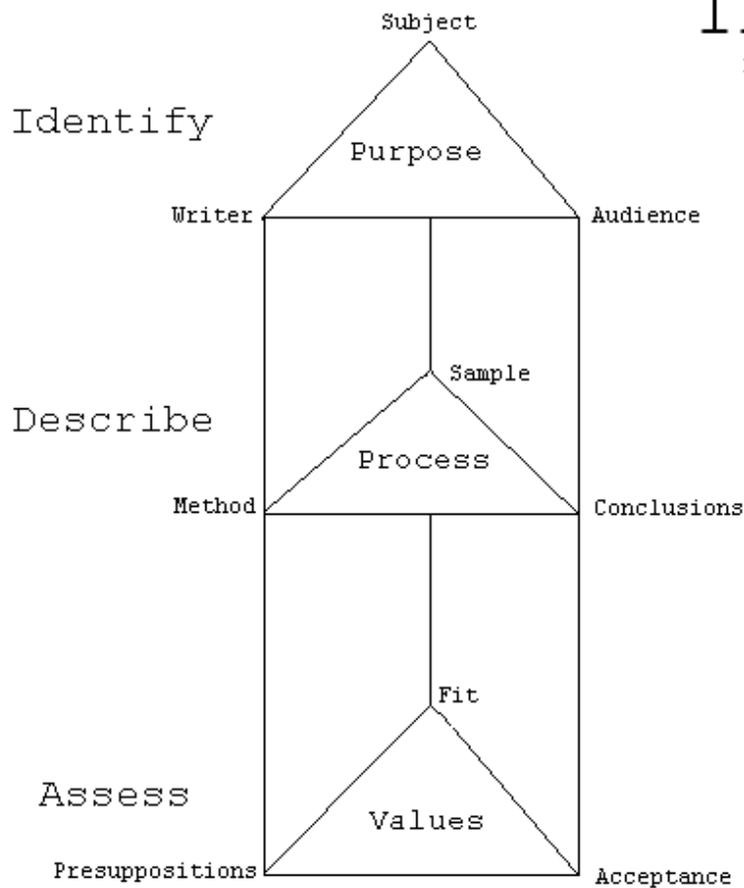
If a reviewer can recall the basic triangle of writer, subject, and audience, and then use the IDeA acronym to recall “identify, describe, and assess,” it is not difficult to reconstruct the entire heuristic model wherever and whenever it is needed. Having generated questions and collected information, the reviewer can compose a critical review which goes beyond bare summary to considerations of intention, presupposition, argumentation, and achievement.

By Carisse Mickey Berryhill, April 18, 1995.

**Using the IDeA Heuristic to Develop a Book Review**  
By Carisse Mickey Berryhill

IDeA

By Carisse Berryhill



(Model based on theoretical models by James Moffett and by Richard Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike.)