



## Review Guidelines for *Christian Education Journal*

[www.biola.edu/cej](http://www.biola.edu/cej)

### Submission and Deadlines

1. The *Christian Education Journal* is published twice each year (Spring and Fall). Book reviews must be submitted to the appropriate Area Book Review Editor. For the **Spring issue, by October 15**, and for the **Fall issue, by March 15**.
2. Late submissions will be considered for the next issue. Occasionally additional editing of your review may be requested which would then delay publication for a particular issue. Earlier submissions would permit more time for the editing process.
3. Reviewers are requested to submit reviews in electronic format as an e-mail attachment. Please use one of the latest versions of Word (preferred) (12 pt. Font, Times New Roman). Please list your name and the book reviewed in the message line itself. If your e-mail software does not support attachments, paste the review into the body of your e-mail.

### Content

1. A review should accomplish two things. First, it should give readers the central thesis of the book and a description of its main structure to help readers understand the flow of the book's content. A reviewer may spend more space on parts of the book he or she takes to be more central to the reviewer's concerns. Second, the review should offer an evaluation of the book. At least half of the review should be evaluative. The review should relate the book to the concerns of the orthodox Christian community. The reviewer should keep in mind that *Christian Education Journal* is a journal with two primary audiences: professors of Christian Education and related disciplines, and practitioners in various Christian ministries.
2. Book reviews should be well-written, thoughtful, fair, and written with Christian grace. Major questions that could guide the reviewing process appear on the 3<sup>rd</sup> page. Please keep these in mind in doing the review. Make your review purposeful; get right to the point with a good opening sentence and paragraph. Write with grace. Please do not be preachy or cute.

## Form

1. Book reviews will normally be between 1,000 and 2,000 words; specific words limits may be assigned to the reviewer for a certain book. Note: Give us the word count for your review.
2. Style should follow the *APA style, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.* The text should be double-spaced and include one-inch margins. Minimize software codes embedded in the text (i.e., use left margin justification only, do not use headers or footers; but you may use page numbers). Footnote and endnote references should *not* be used in book reviews. Citations to literature other than the book under review, when necessary, should be inserted parenthetically into the review text as follows (See Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to read a book*, rev., NY: Simon and Schuster, 1972). When quoting directly from the book under review, provide page-number citations in parentheses after the quotation mark and before the period [e.g., “that is ridiculous” (17)]. Do not include “p.” or “pp.” in the page number citation. Be sure to use your spell-checker and grammar checker, but do not rely on these to be the only kind of proof-reading done.
3. The headline bibliographical data for the review should follow these examples (book title first in italics, author’s name [first, middle initial/name, last name; no titles], place of publication and publisher, year, number of pages, and price, followed by “paper” if a paperback [otherwise hardback will be assumed]. It is important to include number of pages and the retail price of the book. For example:

*A history of Christian education.* By James E. Reed and Ronnie F. Prevost. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman. 1993. 386pp. \$34.99. paper.

*Evangelical dictionary of Christian education.* Edited by Michael J. Anthony. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker. 2001. 747pp. \$50.00.

*Foundational issues in Christian education.* 2<sup>d</sup> ed. By Robert Pazmino. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker. 1997. 167pp. \$ 21.99. paper.

4. On a new line, following the information about the book and before the review begins, list the reviewer’s name, department, institutional affiliation, and location; or position title, name of local church or parachurch organization, and location, as follows:

Review by Stephanie R. Smith  
Christian Ministries, ABC College, Chicago, IL



Review by Jack Johnson  
Pastor for Families, First Community Church, Des Moines, IA

## Final Notes

For general questions about these matters, please contact the General Book Review Editor at [jane.carr@biola.edu](mailto:jane.carr@biola.edu) or mail to:

Jane Carr  
Book Review Editor, Christian Education Journal  
Talbot School of Theology  
13800 Biola Ave  
La Mirada, CA 90639

### **Consult these reviewing guidelines:**

"Kinds of Questions a Review Might Answer," "Adler's Four Levels of Reading," and "Adler's Three Phases for Reading and Critiquing a Book"

### **KINDS OF QUESTIONS A BOOK REVIEW MIGHT ANSWER**

(Not all questions need be addressed; space is always limited; select which issues you should address in light of the kind of book it is)

**A. UNDERSTANDING** Before evaluating a book, we must understand it first (more descriptive and factual—up to half of the review; summarize what is the book about; provide sufficient information for a reader to know main points and scope of content)

A1. What is the main subject matter or topic of the book? What is the main problem/question being addressed? What main claim/conclusion is proposed? What are the major sub-claims of the book? Is the book title accurate? Can you suggest a better title? What is important to tell us about the author's qualifications?

A2. Provide a brief overview (by chapter if possible) of book contents (scope). How is the book organized (sequence) (e.g., chapters grouped together within parts?) Is there a main organizing framework or model being followed, explicit or implicit? What kind or genre of book is it fiction? non-fiction? (e.g., academic-technical? semi-technical? popular?) What is the style, tone of the book?

**B. EVALUATION** (professional judgment regarding *how well* the author carried out his or her project, related to the intentions of the author)

B1. Is the argument clear and cogent for the target audience? Does it flow well? Is the argument well supported? How well does the author deliver on his or her promises to address the problem posed? Any weak elements or limitations? Any difficulty in reading the book? From what perspective is the author addressing the issue?

What theological or worldview perspective is/seems to be evident in the book? What is the quantity and quality of the citations?

- B2. Any distinctive or novel contributions/proposals in the book worth mentioning? conceptually? practically? (of personal interest to you?) Any quotes worth including?
- B3. Any problematic claims/critical concerns worth mentioning? What is specifically problematic about this? (Keep in mind a traffic light analogy for potential integration within a Christian worldview: the "green [compatible], yellow [concern, raised questions], red [competing] zone")
- B4. Is there a real need for this book? Why? How does the book and its specific contents relate within the broader context of books from the same field of study? Is the treatment of concepts, issues, authors cited, subject matter similar or different? How so?
- B5. Do you finally agree or not with the conclusion? (See attached notes from Mortimer Adler's *How to Read a Book*) For whom do you think the book was written/target audience or for what use (e.g., undergraduate, masters, doctoral, layperson; as a primary text or supplemental)? Can you recommend the book? Any qualifications to note?

Final note: Any personal reactions to the book? From what specifically? Be careful that underlying reactions don't pervade the texture and tone of your review. Be honest, yet fair and gracious. [Avoid the crimes identified by John Timmerman, "Reforming the Reviewers" *Christian Scholars Review*, 30 (3), Spring 2001, 323-28] Please keep the focus on the book and not on the reviewer. What tone will you take in writing the review? Carefully craft your opening sentence and first paragraph to launch the review, get to the point to inform readers about the book.

### ADLER'S FOUR LEVELS OF READING

Adler, Mortimer J. & Charles Van Doren. (1972). How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading. Rev. ed. NY: Simon & Schuster, pp163-64.

Levels of Reading (Chapter 2)

**First level of reading: Elementary Reading** (Chapter 3) "What does the sentence say?"

**Second level of reading: Inspectional Reading** (Chapter 4): "What is the book/chapter about?"

"Inspectional reading is the art of skimming systematically" in a limited amount of time; "to examine the surface of the book, to learn everything that the surface alone can teach you." "What is the structure of the book and what are the parts?" **Step 1:** Systematic skimming or pre-reading, e.g., read title page and preface, study, table of contents, check index, read summary statements of each chapter (identify major ideas), turn pages and dip in reading paragraphs, pages now and then. **Step 2:** Read the book/chapter as quickly as you can to get the main points and a grasp of the whole, though some parts may not fully make sense; attend to what you can understand.

**Third level of reading: Analytical Reading** (Chapters 6-11)--for complete comprehension

I. FIRST STAGE: Rules for Finding What a Book is About

1. Classify the book according to kind and subject matter.



2. State what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity.
3. Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and outline these parts as you have outlined the whole.
4. Define the problem or problems the author has tried to solve.

## II. SECOND STAGE: Rules for Interpreting a Book's Contents

5. Come to terms with the author by interpreting his key words.
6. Grasp the author's leading propositions by dealing with his most important sentences.
7. Know the author's arguments, by finding them in, or constructing them out of, sequences of sentences.
8. Determine which of his problems the author has solved, and which he has not; and of the latter, decide which the author knew he had failed to solve.

## III. THIRD STAGE: Rules for Criticizing a Book as a Communication of Knowledge

### *A. General Maxims of Intellectual Etiquette*

9. Do not begin criticism until you have completed your outline and interpretation of the book. (Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say "I understand.")
10. Do not disagree disputatiously or contentiously.
11. Demonstrate that you recognize the difference between knowledge and mere personal opinion by presenting good reasons for any critical judgment you make.

### *B. Special Criteria for Points of Criticism*

12. Show wherein the author is uninformed (lacks relevant information; unintended? intended?).
13. Show wherein the author is misinformed ("asserts what is not the case")
14. Show wherein the author is illogical (conclusions do not follow; inconsistent with other claims).
15. Show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete.

Note: Of these last four, the first three are criteria for disagreement. Failing in all of these, you must agree, at least in part, although you may suspend judgment on the whole, in the light of the last point.

Approaches to different kinds of reading (Ch 12-19)

**Fourth level of reading: Syntopical Reading** (Chapter 20)--reading 2 or more books on same subject

## **ADLER'S THREE PHASES FOR READING AND CRITIQUING A BOOK**

(Review outline adapted from Adler & Van Doren, How To Read A Book. 1972)

"Good books are over your head; they would not be good for you if they were not. . . . To keep on reading actively, you must have not only the will to do so, but also the skill--the art that enables you to elevate yourself by mastering what at first sight seems to be beyond you." (p. 48)

Note: The author's purpose is to persuade the reader toward agreement with a certain thesis. A book is not just a presentation of facts (ala a dictionary or encyclopedia).

**Four Main Questions:** (pp 46-47)

1. What is the book about as a whole?
2. What is being said in detail, and how?

3. Is the book true, in whole or part?
4. What is the significance of the book?

### Stage 1--Overview of Book

Skim the book to answer the four items below: Inspect Title page, Table of Contents, Index, Dust Jacket, Preface, Summary statements in key Chapters, quickly skim book, "dipping in" now and then.

- A. Type of Book: Fiction or Non-Fiction (conveying knowledge or expository work)? What type of non-fiction? (primarily Theoretical--that something is the case, persuades you to agree (e.g., history, science, philosophy), or Practical--"how to," persuades you to follow certain advice"; trade, textbook, scholarly; etc.). For whom is the book primarily written? (p. 60)
- B. What is the book about? What is the main subject? State the unity of the whole in sentence or short paragraph. (Does the author explicitly state this unity?) (p. 75)
- C. Basic Outline or Skeleton of the Book? Identify the major parts, and how these parts relate to the whole. How is the book organized (organizational principle)? (p. 76)  
"The reader tries to uncover the skeleton that the book conceals. The author starts with the skeleton and tries to cover it up." (p. 90)
- D. What major problem(s) has the author attempted to solve? What are the author's intentions in the book? (primarily theoretical or practical questions; confirm "A" above). State the major question(s) the author is addressing. What is distinctive about the book in comparison to others on the same subject? What is the unique contribution of this book? (p. 92)

### Stage 2--Author's Argument

- E. What are the Key Terms that the author regularly uses in a technical manner and discover the meaning(s) of each? (p. 96)
- F. What is the Author's Message? Identify the Key Propositions, or Main Claims, or Main Conclusions. The author's argument rests on these key statements. (State these succinctly in your own words.) Consider that definitions may also be main claims. (p. 114)
- G. Trace the Argument of the Book. How Does the Author Support These Main Claims? (Identify the supporting statements that fit with each Main Conclusions). (p. 128) [You also may wish to state the purpose of each chapter and how each chapter fits within the overall argument.]
- H. Which Problems Have Been Solved? Of Those Not Solved, Which Did Author Know He Failed to Solve? (p. 135)

### Stage 3--Critique

Before you can properly critique a book, you must understand the book.

- 2 major options of critique: You can agree, OR you can disagree. (p. 143)  
[or, in some cases, it may be necessary to withhold judgment so you can study the issue more before rendering a judgment]

#### I. Basic Agreement with the Book (3 options)

1. Basic Agreement without qualifications.

Basic Agreement with qualifications.

2. Agreement as far as the book goes--the analysis is correct but incomplete. The author has not solved all the problems he started with (p. 160)
3. Agreement, with minor disagreements (see below for what kind of disagreements are possible).

**J. Basic Disagreement with the Book**

"When you disagree, do so reasonably, and not disputatiously or contentiously."  
(p. 145)

Three options are available (p. 156)

4. The author is uninformed (lacking information relevant to the problem; intentional or unintentional omission?).
5. The author is misinformed ("asserts what is not the case," the author is in error).
6. The author's main argument is illogical, the reasoning is fallacious. The conclusions cannot follow from the reasons offered (non sequitur), or the conclusions are inconsistent with other conclusions in the book. (The reader is to be precise and specifically identify each major fallacy.)

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Then, Write your book review for publication. Look at samples of book reviews for an appropriate form for communicating your ideas. Usually begin with an opening paragraph that quickly tells us what the book is about and why the reader should consider reading the book (and your review). Then the body of the review, and finally a conclusion.

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**Remember the Four Main Questions:** (pp 46-47)

1. What is the book about as a whole?
2. What is being said in detail, and how?
3. Is the book true, in whole or part?
4. What is the significance of the book?