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**GUIDELINES FOR THE REVIEW**

**OF**

**TECHNICAL BOOKS**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

A person reads a book review to assist in deciding if the book qualifies as a suitable addition to their own or their organisations library. A book review is an important role and must fit the specific needs of that audience and must be conducted in a professional manner. Although the review should reflect the views of the reviewer, it is more important that the review compares the book's intended audience or purpose, with the book's actual contents. But it is also important that the review does not offer prejudiced opinions based on the reviewers perception of what the book should or should not contain.

## **2 AIM**

The aim of this document is to provide book reviewers with guidelines for use when reviewing a technical book.

## **3 GENERAL**

### ***3.1 Preparation for the Review***

#### **3.1.1 Understand Parameters of Book Review**

The editor of the publication that has sought your assistance in reviewing a particular technical book will have parameters you must meet:

- General audience background. E.g. are they project managers or chemical engineers?
- The format that the review will be published in, paper or electronic
- Limitations to review, such as length, inclusions of extracts and timing issues.

#### **3.1.2 Currency of the Book**

On receipt of the book:

- Ensure the version you have is the latest version of the book and has not been superseded by a more recent release, and
- The book is still current. It might be the latest edition, but is it still the current state of the art?

This is particularly important for books that are written on:

- Software as it is continually updated, or
- Legislative or statutory legislation that changes often, or

- Recommended or Best Practices and Standards that may change on a regular basis.

### **3.1.3 Your Knowledge of the Subject**

Ensure you have the necessary experience and knowledge in the subject to fairly review the book. If you do not have the necessary experience either:

- Decline to conduct the review, or
- Enlist the help of someone who does have the necessary experience to compliment your shortfalls.

### **3.1.4 Timing of Review**

Be clear of the timing requirements for the review's publication and leave plenty of time for proof reading and reflection of the book and the review by yourself and the editors.

Make a plan with timings for the review and stick to them.

## **3.2 *Writing the Review***

### **3.2.1 Purpose and Target Audience of the Book**

You must state the target audience of the book and purpose of the book. Such knowledge may be obtained from:

- The cover of the book,
- The introduction in the book,
- Advertising literature such as found on the publishers web page and other databases on the Internet such as Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk.
- Your understanding of the target audience based upon the book's content and approach.

This information should form part of the introduction of the review, but should not be the basis of the review.

### **3.2.2 The Book Summary**

You should thoroughly read the book, undertake the workshops or exercises and fully understand the opinion and approach of the author to addressing technical issues.

The book should be read from the perspective of trying to understand and use it work solve problems, much as a student must read the book in order to undertake homework assignments and be tested on its content and knowledge imparted.

Be sure you take notes as to your observations while reading the book.

You should then be able to write the formal a summary of the book which would capture the salient and interesting points concerning the:

- Content,
- Structure and Layout
- Table of Contents and Index,
- Photos, Diagrams, Screen Dumps and Tables,
- Clarity and Readability.

State the type of book, for example is it:

- Teaching
- Reference
- Methodology
- Procedure
- Discussion

### **3.2.3 Finding**

You should now be able to compare the purpose with the content and clearly state if the book achieves the books stated and implied objectives.

Try to present a balanced view of book including its good and bad points. Do not just state your opinion but rather base it upon selected specific examples that you will share with your review audience.

At all times, you should be careful to remain objective and logical. For the target audience, does the book meet its stated aim? Is this aim actually a valuable one to overall understanding of the subject matter? Are there any errors in the book that would mislead the reader? You must always keep in mind the review's audience and meet their needs.

Unless the book is a disaster then, it is strongly suggested that strong negative comments be avoided. Clearly stating what is in the book is better than stating what is not in the book. This approach leaves all parties, the author, reviewer and reader comfortable and avoids much of the unnecessary heated debate that follows a factually incorrect or exceedingly negative review of a book.

Questions you may want to ask yourself include:

- Is the title accurate and fit the knowledge level of the material presented?

- What level of experience is needed to effectively use the book?
- What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the book?
- Who will find the book most useful?
- Is the depth appropriate for the stated audience?
- Is the material new or present a different approach, or is it a rehash of existing texts?
- Is the book technically accurate?
- How clearly is the material presented?
- Are the tables, figures / illustrations appropriate and well executed?

### **3.2.4 Other Considerations**

The reviewer should at all times consider the audience of the review and the type of information that they would be interested in.

The reviewer should avoid expressing his personal opinion of what a book should or should not have been written for.

The book review must be limited to the book that is actually available for review and not one that is not available or is a figment of the reviewer's imagination.

Consider discussing the review with the author (if permissible under the publication's guidelines). The author will be able to give considerable insight on the structure and content of the book, which could make your life easier. However, do not fall into a trap of letting the book review mimic the marketing literature printed on the front and back cover of the book. The review at all times must remain factual and independent.

### **3.3 *Checking the Review***

When checking the it is advisable:

- To remove or superfluous words.
- Use short sentences with a relevant piece of information in each sentence.
- Avoid colloquial terms or word that would not be understood by people from another country.
- Seek peer review of your draft book review prior to submitting it to the editors. You are the 'technical expert', editors are not, and this is why you are being asked to perform the review. The editors are relying on your intimate knowledge of the subject to read and report on the book.

### **4 REVIEW SUBMISSION**

The review should provide the reader with the following typical statistics:

- Title
- Subtitle
- Author
- ISBN
- Date of publication
- Number of pages
- Where it may be purchased if not generally available from book stores
- Binding, paperback or hard back, special format, etc, and
- Is it accompanied with software or tapes?

The review should be submitted to the editors well before the agreed date so they have sufficient time to discuss with you the content of the review and implement any necessary revisions.

Paul E Harris

Director Eastwood Harris