



How to write a book review

Jo Parfitt

Writing a book review is a great way to get your name in print. It is also a way to get yourself a free book.

Authors and publishers need their books to be reviewed in as many places as possible. It provides vital publicity.

What can you write about?

It can be useful to specialise in one or two areas. In this way you can build a database of websites, magazines, newspapers, trade publications, free publications and so on that also focus on your area. Publications like to print reviews, not least because they are good space fillers, but also because they can be easily illustrated by the book's cover. Sometimes the book's publisher will offer a special discount or free copies to readers too, which makes the publication even happier to take the review. Furthermore, if they do not have to pay for your review they will be even happier.

I specialise in writing reviews of books that are of interest to people living and working abroad or the publishing industry, myself, and that means that I regularly receive the latest editions of books on subjects including:

- Buying property abroad
- Living and working in certain countries
- People who live or work or travel overseas
- Novels with an expat theme
- Self-development
- Careers
- Portable careers
- Expatriate careers
- General books by an expatriate author
- Changing your life
- Getting published
- Writing
- Self-publishing

And many more.

Where can you source the books to review?

Because of my own specialist areas, I receive books regularly from:

- Culture Smart!
- Kogan-Page
- Nicholas Brealey International

- How To Books
- Times Warner
- Survival Books
- Lean Marketing Press
- Expatriate Press
- Capstone

And countless small presses and the authors themselves. Keep your eyes open for new publications.

In the first instance contact the publishers and ask them to send you press releases for new books. Then, once you have a guarantee that a popular website or publication will take your reviews, you can ask for a copy of the book to be posted to you, or to receive a PDF version via email. So long as the publication you are writing for is read by potential purchasers of the book you hope to review, most publishers will be happy to send you a book. And yes, you do get to keep it!

So, how do you review a book?

Check the target publication for any existing reviews and you will get an idea of how many words they are as well as the kind of information they include. For example, the review may contain the following information before the text of your review:

ISBN number

Author name

Book title

Book subtitle

Publisher

Website of publisher

Number of pages

Type of book – hardback/ paperback for example

Price

Publication date

Edition number

If you have no sample review to model before you write yours then ask the editor of the website/magazine/paper what they need you to include. Ask too how many words they want, and then ensure you write to that length. Typically, reviews are short at between 100 and 300 words. The word count includes the factual information at the start. Do not forget to put your own name, your byline, at the end of the piece.

Six steps to writing a book review

1. Identify a book you would like to review.
2. Find a publication would agrees to take your review and find out:
 - a. Their required word count
 - b. The information you need to include
 - c. When they want the review by
 - d. Whether they want a cover illustration and of what size and format

- e. Request your press copy of the book and any existing press releases and cover illustration
 - f. Receive the book
 - g. Read the back cover text, the flyleaf and any accompanying press release you may have been sent. Often, it is convenient to paraphrase some of this for your review. After all, the publisher chose these words carefully as a synopsis for the book. Of course, the publisher's material and promotion are designed to attract the reader and will be subjective. Now it is up to you to be objective.
3. Read the book (or extracts from most of the sections). Get a feel for the following:
 - a. Tone
 - b. Style
 - c. Readability of the text
 - d. Layout
 - e. Structure of the content
 - f. How it looks
 - g. The type of book it is – handbook, manual, how to, autobiography, self-help, practical.
 - h. Consider what the reader will gain from reading the book
 - i. Consider where the book fails, in your opinion
 - j. Consider what you like about the book and list the elements that work well.
 - k. Consider what you feel may have been lacking
 - l. Notice the ingredients used by the author – exercises, summaries, cartoons, case studies, anecdotes and so on.
 - m. Consider the reader to whom you think the book would most appeal.
 - n. Consider how suitable the author may be as the creator of this book.
 4. Write the review, according to the required word count, including the most important facts and your byline.
 5. Check your review and submit to the editor by email, by the required deadline as an attachment. Include the cover illustration too. Request to be notified when the review is out and get a copy for your files.
 6. When your review is out it is nice to notify the publisher of your book. Ask to be kept informed of any new titles.

Sample reviews

Here is a review I just wrote for the Expat Living section of the [Weekly Telegraph](#). Notice how the review is 277 words but the whole contribution is 288.

NLP 4 U

Ian Halsall

Lloyd West Publishing

222 pages, paperback, £14 (includes postage)

www.nlp4asia.com

NLP is a hot topic at the moment. Few people remain unaware that this acronym stands for Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Still fewer consider its principles to be bunkum. Ten years ago this Midlands born author discovered that the NLP skills he had learned in the USA worked just as well in his business as in his personal life. So he moved to Asia to teach what he had learned. And there he has remained.

It is hard to come from the Midlands and not be down to earth and Halsall is no exception, which is why his books, and NLP4U is his third book on the subject, are so incredibly easy to read. In short, NLP is the study of human excellence and its tools allow users to get great results. Halsall believes that NLP is not only a fabulous, life-changing tool, but a skill that is much in demand. Not only is it of benefit to corporations but also in the fields of coaching and mentoring.

This book focuses on how to use NLP to sell things and to persuade others. Skills that we all need regardless of whether we work in a sales environment. Within seconds of completing this book I was able to put what I had learned to good use in a classified advertisement. I will also use its methods to persuade my children to tidy their bedrooms.

This book is practical and while it seems to cover a lot of ground rather fast, this rapid-fire approach is part of its charm. If you are looking for a quick and comprehensive tour of NLP NLP4U is for you.

Jo Parfitt

288 words

Parenting Abroad

Ngairé Jehle-Caitcheon

Aletheia Publications

258 pages, paperback \$19.95

The author comes from New Zealand, her husband is Swiss and their two children are real Third Culture Kids who have lived all over the world, surviving war, evacuation and employer bankruptcy. She also has a degree in psychology and a masters in sociology among many other qualifications which prove her suitability to write a book of this kind. It is interesting, practical and full of insight, help and support for any expatriate family. This book goes into great detail about how to understand, advise and motivate your children despite upheaval. It will help any parent to cope with such issues as saying goodbye, depression and education and considers each age and stage separately. The author certainly knows her stuff and includes examples and case studies from parents and children all over the world to add authenticity to a book no parent should be without.

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157 words

Coaching Across Cultures
Philippe Rosinski
Nicholas Brealey Publishing
314 pages, flexibound, £19.99

Mckinsey and and Deloitte Touche are two companies to have discovered, after much internal research, that the provision of business coaches is one of the best ways to retain and motivate their employees. Yet, today's increasingly global economy dictates that the best coaches should also have the ability to add intercultural understanding to their coaching. Philippe Rosinski can claim to be an expert in the field of coaching across cultures and he was the first continental European to be designated Master Certified Coach by the International Coach Federation. During the last ten years his goal has not simply to create a coaching model that crosses cultures, but that forms solid bridges not only between cultures but also between coaching and interculturalism. He is determined that these two professions, coaching and interculturalism, appreciate the importance of the other.

Rosinski's own clients: Unilver, IBM, Baxter Healthcare and Chubb Insurance are proud to be associated with this book and willingly allowed examples from their work with him to be included. Clearly passionate about his topic, the author appears determined to make the reader understand why this matters, where coaching comes from and the huge difference it can make to a business. Throughout the book he provides explanations, techniques and a variety of solutions that he has developed and worked with, such as the Cultural Orientation Framework, teaches the Global Coaching Process and uses the Global Scorecard.

This clearly written book is a serious read. It is thoroughly researched, detailed and fairly academic. It bursts at the seams with examples, diagrams and case studies. Drawing on areas from Transactional Analysis to Neuro Linguistic Programming, it appears that no intercultural stone has been left unturned.

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292 words

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