Book Review Writing Tips

1. Before you begin writing, make a few notes about the points you want to get across.
2. While you're writing, try thinking of your reader as a friend to whom you're telling a story.
3. Try to mention the name of the author and the book title in the first paragraph — there's nothing more frustrating than reading a review of a great book but not knowing who wrote it and what the title is!
4. If possible, use one paragraph for each point you want to make about the book. It's a good way to emphasize the importance of the point. You might want to list the main points in your notes before you begin.
5. Try to get the main theme of the book across in the beginning of your review. Your reader should know right away what he or she is getting into should they choose to read the book!
6. Think about whether the book is part of a genre. Does the book fit into a type like mystery, adventure, or romance? What aspects of the genre does it use?
7. What do you like or dislike about the book's writing style? Is it funny? Does it give you a sense of the place it's set? What is the author's/narrator's "voice" like?
8. Try using a few short quotes from the book to illustrate your points. This is not absolutely necessary, but it's a good way to give your reader a sense of the author's writing style.
9. Make sure your review explains how you feel about the book and why, not just what the book is about. A good review should express the reviewer's opinion and persuade the reader to share it, to read the book, or to avoid reading it.
10. Do research about the author and incorporate what you learn into the review. Biographical information can help you formulate your opinion about the book, and gives your review a "depth." Remember, a book doesn't come directly from a printing press, it's a product of an author's mind, and therefore it may be helpful to know something about the author and how she or he came to write the book.

**Every book review is different, but each successful review includes a couple of key elements. As you think about what you want to say in your review, complete these challenges. They're designed to help you work on telling your reader what's most important.**

* **Describe the setting of the book.** How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? A book's setting is one of its most vital components — particularly for a book like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is set in the past. Does the author make you feel like you're a part of the setting? Can you picture the book's setting if you close your eyes? As you write, try to pass on to your reader the sense of the setting and *place* that the author has provided.
* **Describe the book's main characters.** Does the writer make you believe in them as people? Why or why not? Think about whether you like the characters and about how liking them or disliking them makes you feel about the book. As you write about the characters, use examples of things they've said or done to give a sense of their personalities.
* **Give your reader a taste of the plot, but don't give the surprises away.** Readers want to know enough about what happens in a book to know whether they'll find it interesting. But they never want to know the ending! Summarize the plot in a way that will answer some questions about the book, but leave other questions in the reader's mind. You may want to make a list of questions about the book before you begin.

**Now that you've completed the challenges and written your first draft, it's time to begin revising. As many published writers will tell you, rewriting is one of the most important parts of writing anything — from book reviews to actual books! These guidelines will help you prepare the second version of your review.**

1. Check back through the writing tips and make sure you've incorporated as many of the suggestions as possible.
2. Read through each paragraph and make sure the main point is clear. For instance, the point of one of your paragraphs might be to describe the book's main character. As you read that paragraph, make sure that it gets across what you most want to say about the character. That way, the character will be vivid in your reader's mind.
3. If a sentence or paragraph seems awkward or unclear, it has to be rewritten — and rewriting is what separates good writing from bad. Begin by trying to simplify.
4. Check to make sure you're not repeating yourself. (This can be easy to do when you're trying to get an important point across!) Make sure you state your main points clearly and emphatically. Then explain *why* the point is important, instead of saying it again. Repetitive writing makes for dull reading.