Introduction:
As undergraduates, most university students are unfamiliar with the process of drafting and editing a publishable book review article. The information presented in this leaflet provides comprehensive instructions on the finer points of producing a polished book review article, and includes tips on effective note-taking, and refining research skills.

What is a book review article?
A book review article is a piece of academic writing that critically analyses and evaluates newly published literature, and incorporates the elements of a book review and a literature review into a single article. It consists of two main parts: a book review and a literature review. It is usually a mixture of personal opinion, specific quotes and content from the novel, and scholarly works. Book review articles are often themed, and critique several arguments about the text within that thematic framework.

The book review serves to not only summarise the book, but to introduce themes and issues that you have identified in the text. It should contain your own reflections and interpretations of themes presented in the book. The purpose of the literature review is to add interpretations and reflection of themes in the text that are not your own. These pieces can either support or offer alternative views on your interpretations of the novel. Combined, the book review and literature review provide the correct blend of personal and academic opinion to create a cohesive, argumentative article.

Why write a book review article?
A good book review offers a personal dimension to a novel, allowing the author of the article to convey their theories and arguments about the book in a clear manner. It can also serve as a means of measuring the weight or relevance of several different arguments about the novel, in the style of an argumentative essay. But most importantly, a good book review article provides its audience with a focused look at the novel, with the advantage of academic backing and critique.

The following steps are designed to make the planning, scripting and editing of your book review article easier. Please read the instructions carefully and follow all of the steps outlined. If you have any difficulties or questions about the process, you should contact your lecturer, tutor or learning support team for further clarification.

Step 1: How to write a book review

1. Read the book thoroughly.
On your first reading, read to enjoy the book. Good literature cannot be properly appreciated if it is only read because it is compulsory for your course. The difference between a good book review article and an excellent one often depends on the author’s ability to understand the underlying themes and emotions woven into the text. So, think about: paint pictures of the characters in your mind, and try to appreciate what it offers you as a reader.

2. Identify main themes
When you have completed the initial reading, take out a piece of paper and brainstorm the main themes and key characters and concepts of the book. Don’t be afraid of writing down trivial points—these could be more important than you think! Simply scribble down everything that comes to mind without reserve—save the analysis for later. At this stage it is also a good idea to briefly write a synopsis- or summary- of the book. These notes will provide you with easy access to the basic concepts and themes of the novel as you continue to plan your review.

3. Read the book again.
This time, read the book analytically, paying close attention to some of the deeper themes and concepts that emerged upon your initial reading. As you come across pages that catch your attention, mark them with small pieces of paper or post-it notes.

It is also a good idea to make a list of the points, and their relative page numbers, on a separate piece of paper: this will save confusion when you need to find a specific reference quickly. As you read the book, write down any other themes and concepts you might have missed in the initial reading, as these could be important when you begin to script the review.

4. Research, research, research!
Break this into four areas:

- **Historical Background**: If you are unfamiliar with the historical/social context in which the book was written, it will show in your assignment. At this preliminary stage, you should briefly investigate the history of the region, and the era in which the book was set.

- **Material relevant to your theme**: You may find some of the information written relevant to your theme valuable, even if it does not specifically mention your book. For example, if you have identified a key theme of your novel that looks at aspects of mental illness, you may want to look at some reports on society’s acceptance of the mentally ill. If you choose to use such material, be certain that the information provided is credible and acceptable for inclusion in a piece of academic writing. This is particularly valuable for new books that may not have existed for long enough to warrant any serious academic attention. However, if you wish to use many resources not specifically linked to the novel itself, check with your editor/lecturer to ensure that the material is relevant and appropriate.

- **Resource materials**: Items specifically written about the book, such as online lesson activities, chapter notes or teaching resources will give you some ideas about the sorts of things that should feature in your article.

- **Other book reviews (NOT YOUR BOOK!)**: By reading other book reviews, you will see the basic layout and ideas that should be included in your article. However, by reading a review on your book, you run the risk of accidentally adopting the arguments of the aforementioned review.

**Note:**
Before you research in this manner it is imperative that you have read the book at least twice and have thoroughly brainstormed concepts independently. Your work must be your own.

Remember: The assessor is interested in what you have to say about the book, and will not be impressed by too many ‘borrowed’ concepts from other authors and resources. While it is important to include these in your work, be certain that they do not overpower your own contributions, and ensure that you correctly reference anything that is not your own.

Plagiarism is frowned upon, and will only damage your reputation as a credible academic author.

5. Formulate a Plan
Now that you have read the book twice, and thoroughly researched the topic, turn back to the notes that you have made. These need to be refined and consolidated into key arguments. Some people find it useful to create a mind map, using the most prominent themes as a basis. Others use matrices or lists—it’s really up to you. Whichever vehicle you use should ensure that you end up with a list of your key arguments, and the points that you want to make in the article.

- For a good essay of 1000 words, you should have 3-4 main points
- For an essay of 1500-2000 words, you should have 5-6, etc

6. Start Introduction/ Formulate hypothesis
To write a good introduction, engage in a bit of creative thought! By this stage, you will have a large amount of information on the book—far too much to write straight from. The best way to shorten this is to imagine that you have just bumped into someone who knows nothing about the book, but is
very interested in what you have to say. Try to explain the crux of your essay in as little time as possible- one minute should do it. Write this into sentences, polish it, and you have completed your hypothesis- the summary of your argument.

7. Construct the Body

Using the detailed plan you constructed in step 5, write a paragraph on the first key argument you listed. Begin the paragraph with a topic sentence- a sentence that succinctly states the crux of the concept you wish to address in the paragraph. To tease out the topic sentence, use the same process as outlined in step 6. Next, elaborate on the content of the argument, using persuasive and well- written sentences. Try to keep these succinct, don’t get carried away on trivial points that will confuse your audience, and support your statements with factual evidence from the novel. To conclude your paragraph, create a sentence that restates the main argument and provides a coherent link to subsequent paragraphs.

Repeat this process until all key points established in step 6 are adequately covered.

8. Write a Conclusion

To end the article, write a concluding paragraph that cohesively links the key points discussed throughout the paper, by briefly reiterating them. A strong conclusion is brief yet informative, and serves as a means of amalgamation, bringing the review to a collective and concise conclusion that reaffirms your analysis of the novel.

Note:

The planning outlined in steps 4, 5, and 6 hopefully put you in good stead to write a comprehensive and succinct introduction on which to build the rest of your review. However, proofreading is always a must and the whole article must flow effortlessly to create a comprehensive and engaging review.

Once you have finished the conclusion, check the appropriateness of your introduction. Is it still relevant to the essay? Do you need to add extra points? Or do you need to omit some? Remember, editing is the key to an excellent article.

Step 2: How to Write a Literature Review

9. Read the book analytically

The literature review requires extensive knowledge of the book in question, allowing the reader to tease out the sublime messages inherent in each chapter. Hence, it is imperative that you read the book once again, paying close attention to the notes constructed for the book review (see step 4, how to write a book review).

10. Article Search

After you have read the book for a third time and reviewed your notes, search for five or more articles relating to the key themes illustrated in the book review.

Although there are plenty of resources available for your perusal, you should be objective in your selection, giving serious consideration only to those articles that are peer reviewed and pertinent to your themes. Try to find at least one credible article for each point you make in your book review. When you have obtained these articles, make a note of the references, ensuring you have written down full bibliographic details.

Note:

To obtain scholarly articles that will provide you with the most reliable information, you should subject each document to the following test. Generally, if it meets these criteria, it is suitable to use in an academic literary review.

1. Check the reliability of the resources. Look for well-established journals and websites, and academic texts, always checking the name and credibility of the author. If the document is peer reviewed, its credibility is ensured to be genuine.

2. Check the date of publication. The older material available, while relevant, does not provide evidence of more recent arguments.

3. If the article is on the World Wide Web, check who is responsible for its publication. Their accessibility, and the organisation to which they belong will generally indicate how credible the article is, and its bias.

11. Analysis of the article: a checklist

This checklist will help you to correctly evaluate your selected articles. Answer the questions in sentences, and use them to form the body of your literature review.

- Who wrote the article? What are their qualifications? Why did they write the article?

- What is their bias? Do they belong to an organisation intimately associated with the novel you are reviewing (eg: the publisher)? Have they published other works of a similar nature? Which academics do they refer to in their article? Do they show the other side of the story?

- What are their key arguments? What are their main points?

- How authentic are their arguments? Are their arguments reliable? Are they well researched? Are they adequately explained?

- Do you agree with what has been written? Does this conflict with your personal views of the book? Can you support these views with factual evidence from the book? Can you support these views with factual evidence from the other articles?

- How is their article relevant to my article? Is there a common strand that ties the articles together? Does it either support or offer an alternative view to the one that I have proposed? Can I use this article in my review?

Note: Introduction and Conclusion

The introduction and conclusion should be constructed in accordance to the guidelines set out in the book review guide (see points 6 and 8).

12. Editing and Referencing

Once you have completed your preliminary draft, it is vitally important that you check over your work. If possible, also have it read by another person, preferably someone who has experience in the literary field, i.e. a tutor, peer or lecturer.

When referencing, check that your style is in accordance with standard referencing procedures. Always make clear notes (including URL details) of any resources you have cited; only include those you have cited in your reference list.
Step 3: How to Consolidate the Reviews

13. Read Reviews

Read over the book and literature reviews. At this stage you should have two separate articles that have been well researched, written and edited. Both should be to a publishable standard.

14. Consolidate

The book review article uses components of the literature review to support statements made in the book review to create a book review article. Because you have two separate articles, it is extremely important that you take care to thoroughly edit when creating the new book review article so to minimise any inconsistencies or repetitions in the text.

The introduction for the book review article should simply be the introduction written for the book review. Because the literature review component of this new article serves to extend and support the arguments put forward in the book review, there should be no need to add any additional information to the original hypothesis statement that doubles as the introductory paragraph. If there are any additional points not mentioned in the book review’s introduction, simply add these to the existing introductory paragraph by following the instructions in step 5.

The articles that you critiqued in your literature review should correspond with the specific points in the book review, and, when combined, should create the main body of the new article. To combine the two, construct the paragraphs so that the literature review provides further evidence for the statements that you make in the book review. Each paragraph should begin with a strong topic sentence stating the key point to be discussed, followed with the argument, supplemented by evidence from the text, and the evidence presented in the literature review. The paragraph should continue with further critical analysis from the literature review, and a sentence explaining the relevance of this point to the article’s key argument. The book review article should combine personal views from the book review and professional ideas and opinions from the literary critique to create an article that encompasses the ideas, characters, social experiences, and underlying themes of the book.

To conclude the article, the conclusion written for the book review should fit well. However, as with the introductory paragraph, if there is a need to further extend the conclusion, follow the procedure outlined in step 8.

15. Editing and Referencing

To ensure that the new article is of a publishable standard it is extremely important that it is thoroughly checked for errors or inconsistencies, and edited appropriately. Once you have read the article through a couple of times, carefully checking for grammatical errors and flaws in arguments, pass the article onto someone else to double-check. It is recommended that you read your work, and make your own alterations, before passing it on to another person, as the skill of self-evaluation is most important to aspiring academics. When you do ask someone else to check your work, try to find someone from your area of study: this will ensure that your work is edited to the stipulations of your field, and to a publishable standard. These editors could include peers, tutors, lecturers or experts in the field.

NEVER SUBMIT AN ARTICLE THAT HAS BEEN CHECKED LESS THAN THREE TIMES.

When writing academic articles, it is also rudimentary that you acknowledge any work that is not your own, usually through referencing. Most universities and publishing houses have strict referencing guidelines that are designed to protect authors and academics from illegal plagiarism. Check with your appropriate institution for referencing guidelines, and ensure that permission is sought if you wish to include photographs, film or other print media that is not your own. Remember,

IF IN DOUBT, ALWAYS REFERENCE IT!