

WRITING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

Given now what you know from the “What is a Thesis Statement” article, how do you write a clear, focused and directive thesis statement for different kinds of written compositions? Let’s here consider thesis statements in writing book/article reviews.

Book/Article Reviews

A book review or report is normally a composition of a simple nature often of 5-10 pages. It is commonly used to either inform or evaluate (not persuade) the content or author’s intention in a book/article. A book review normally is written assuming that the reader has not read the book/article at all. Writing the thesis statement for a book review is relatively easy because the very nature of the composition informs the reader. That is, the reader opens the book review already with a strong and often accurate intuition of what the paper will attempt to do.

In preparing to write a book/article review, the writer should consider how successful the book author is at accomplishing his/her own thesis. Therefore the review writer must work to identify and understand the book author’s thesis.¹ Oftentimes the book author’s thesis is set forth in the book’s introduction.

The following examples pertain to writing the thesis statement for the review, not identifying the book author’s thesis.

Example 1:

For my book review, I have read and evaluated Dr. Gamaliel’s popular book entitled *How to Stop Christianity from Spreading*, published by Pharisee Press. Dr. Gamaliel’s purpose is easy to understand and I should assume that my reader has not read this book. In writing my review, in this case, I wish to inform the reader about the book’s content (Dr. Gamaliel’s intent, reasoning, and main points), and evaluate the book’s strong and weak points. I might design my thesis statement for this review like so:

The following review of Gamaliel’s work, *How to Stop Christianity from Spreading*, will include a summary of the book’s contents along with a survey of its major strengths and weaknesses.

Note this example thesis implies I do not need to persuade the reader of anything. The thesis statement gives the content of the entire book review in one clear summary sentence. Wisely assuming that my reader has not read the book, the survey of book contents and its strengths and weaknesses is the most effective and efficient way to instruct the reader. If the book review has a different purpose, this should change my thesis statement accordingly.

Since a book/article review is a personal reflection by the writer, it is often acceptable for the review to be written in either the first person “I/we” perspective or the more formal and academic third person “he/she/it” perspective.² Example 1 above uses the third person viewpoint. Example 2 below is the same thesis statement using the first person viewpoint.

Example 2:

In the following review of Gamaliel's work, *How to Stop Christianity from Spreading*, I will summarize the book's contents and survey its major strengths and weaknesses.

The thesis statement will commonly not be the first sentence of the review. The review will probably begin with a relevant introduction to grab the reader's attention. The thesis statement might fit logically and effectively at the middle or the end of the introduction.

¹ For comments relevant to reading a book critically, see: Hacker, Diana (2006). *The Bedford handbook* (7th ed.). Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martins, pp. 555-567.

² For discussion and illustrations of valid and poor stylistic uses of first, second, and third person perspectives, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 56-60, 178-179.