

‘People often ask me what I look for in reviewers. Below I have listed some of the attributes I admire. Please note that this is just one literary editor’s desideratum – others will have different needs and expectations. My aim is to be direct, practical, encouraging.’

Peter Rose, Editor

Australian Book Review

- Familiarise yourself with the tenor and house style of the newspaper or magazine
- Be sure that you really want to write for a particular magazine (there are plenty of other ones around); that it suits your own style, taste, politics, etc.
- It won’t hurt your chances if you show familiarity with a publication – and support it with a subscription
- Most editors welcome requests to review particular books. If you really want to review a book, get in early – others will
- Don’t expect immediate replies and don’t be downcast if they say no
- When you are starting out, don’t expect to be offered the new Margaret Atwood or Peter Carey novel; bide your time
- When an editor offers you a book, reply promptly (editors need to turn books round quickly and may go elsewhere after a day or so)
- Always ask if you’ll be paid and edited and if you’ll be shown the edit; it’s your right
- Don’t feel obliged to accept every book on offer: be sure the book is right for you and that the commission is practicable
- *ABR* usually gives book reviewers three to five weeks with a book, but sometimes we need reviews of major and/or embargoed books within a week; newspapers tend to work with shorter time frames
- Arts reviews are another matter. These are usually needed within two or three days. Consult our separate Advice for *ABR* Arts Contributors for more information
- Editors will stress the urgency/importance of some reviews: don’t let them down
- Editors appreciate candour; it won’t harm your chances if you decline a book now and then (but don’t knock back six books in a row!)
- If you feel uneasy about reviewing a particular author, for whatever reason (love, hate, apathy, unfamiliarity), be open and enquire about something else
- Decline books by authors with large oeuvres with which you are totally unacquainted
- If you do accept a book by an author you haven’t read, read some other works by that author (it shows if you don’t!)
- Reviews of major authors that fail to cite any of their earlier works are inadequate
- Enlist literary/historical/cultural references and maxims to enliven your reviews. Trot out those favourite quotes. Have fun with it. Show off a little. Keep the reader on his/her toes.
- Read the book closely, and read it more than once
- Heed the brief, agreed length, and deadline
- We often commission reviews of 920 words (i.e. one page in the magazine). Adhering to this word limit helps in the production of the magazine and endears writers to editors

- Give prompt notice of any likely delay
- Lateness, like poor prose, will curtail your work as an *ABR* reviewer
- Editors relish wit and irony – though not the comedy festival kind!
- Generally, avoid the perpendicular pronoun; a review is not autobiography
- That said, some reviews and commentaries demand a more direct, personal voice
- Aim for literary dash, good grammar, individuality, and confidence
- If you really like – or dislike – a book, say so, and say why; don't be coy
- Show due but not limitless respect for major authors
- Syntax is a wonderful resource, infinitely supple; employ it artfully
- We don't all have to write the same way
- Watch those adverbs, superlatives, clichés, and exclamation marks
- There's no room in short reviews for any fat (e.g. 'really', 'truly', 'of course', 'very', 'As I was saying', etc.)
- If a sentence is making you seasick with its undulations, shorten it
- Give a sense of an 'organic' review, one emerging from careful appraisal, rather than from preconceptions or publicity material
- Brief quotations from books are an essential tool of the critic. Books that go unquoted in reviews feel unread or unappreciated. But avoid lengthy quotes, and remember, many readers skip indented quotes
- Write reviews that are small works of art, not consumer tools
- With major books, ones that have been reviewed widely elsewhere, write reviews that add to or challenge our understanding of the book – not just repetitious codas to or echoes of earlier reviews
- Don't feel you have to sum up a book in the final paragraph with a ringing endorsement or denunciation. Great critics often convey their verdict through phrasing, quotation, and logical argument
- With fiction, don't rely on plot descriptions and never give away the denouement
- Before submitting your review, read it aloud to yourself or to someone whose judgement you trust; it's the best way to pick up typos and repetitions
- If you submit timely, literate, well-proofed reviews, you'll be surprised how much work comes your way
- Magazines have limited editorial resources and editors don't have time for long edits. Don't expect them to do all your work for you (e.g. poor spelling, loose grammar, dangling modifiers)
- Once you have submitted the review, don't pepper your editor with new versions. Wait until he/she gets back to you with the edited version
- That said, never hesitate to point out an error. We're in this together and we all want to get things right. Corrections can always be made online after publication
- Everyone needs to be edited. Respect the editor's craft and experience
- An editor's role is to help you present your work with the utmost accuracy, clarity, and finesse
- That said, if you disagree with changes or corrections, say so
- No hissy fits!

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