

‘People often ask me what I look for in reviewers. Below I have listed some of the attributes I admire in reviewers. Please note that this is just one literary editor’s desideratum – others will have different 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; that it suits your own style and aesthetics (there are plenty of other ones around)
- It won’t hurt your chances if you show familiarity with a publication – and support it with a subscription
- Most editors welcome polite requests to review particular books
- Don’t expect immediate replies and don’t be downcast if they say no
- Don’t be coy about asking about fees; it’s your right
- 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 over quickly and may go elsewhere after a day or so)
- Don’t feel obliged to accept every book on offer: be sure that the book is right for you, and that the commission is practicable
- *Abr* usually gives reviewers three or four weeks with a book, but sometimes we need reviews of major and/or embargoed books within a week or less; newspapers tend to work with shorter time frames
- Editors will stress the urgency/importance of some reviews: don’t let them down
- Be realistic before agreeing to review something quickly
- 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 candid and ask for 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 references, allusions, history, and maxims to enliven your reviews
- Read the book closely, and read it more than once if you have time
- Heed the brief and the agreed length and deadline

- Give prompt notice of any likely delay
- Lateness, like poor prose, will shorten your work as a reviewer
- Editors relish wit and irony – though not the comedy festival kind!
- Avoid the perpendicular pronoun; a review is not autobiography
- 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 established 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
- 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
- Limit quotations from books you are reviewing; 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
- With fiction, don't rely on plot descriptions and never give away the denouement
- Before submitting your review, read it aloud to yourself or 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 by how much work comes your way
- Once you have submitted the review, don't pepper your editor with new versions
- Magazines have limited editorial resources and editors don't have time for long edits
- Everyone needs to be edited (even editors!) Respect their craft, their experience
- That said, if you disagree with changes or corrections, say so
- No hissy fits!

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