

Many people ask me what I look for in reviewers. Obviously, good critics have many different qualities. Below I have listed some of the attributes I look for 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)
- most editors welcome polite requests to review particular books
- 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 (usually by email), 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 give 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
- good editors will stress the urgency/importance of particular 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 and unpersuasive

- 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
- 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 dénouement
- 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 review, 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 and newspapers 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!