

Many people ask me what I – what literary editors in general – look for in reviewers. Obviously, many different qualities make up a first-rate critic of any kind. Below I have listed some of the attributes I hope to find in a reviewer. Please note that this is just one literary editor's desideratum – others will have different expectations.

Peter Rose, Editor
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- familiarise yourself with the magazine/newspaper and its tenor and house style
- 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; but 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 Garner or Carey, or the latest biography of Tolstoy; bide your time
- when an editor offers you a book (usually by email), reply to her promptly
- don't feel obliged to accept every book that's offered to you: be sure that the book is right for you, and that the commission is practicable
- magazines such as *ABR* usually give reviewers at least three weeks with a book, but sometimes they need reviews of certain works (e.g. major and/or embargoed books) within a week or less; newspapers tend to work with shorter time frames
- be realistic before agreeing to review something by next Tuesday; does it suit you? Is it feasible?
- editors appreciate candour; it won't harm your chances if you decline a book now and then (though don't knock back six books in a row)
- if you feel uneasy about reviewing a particular author, for whatever reason (love, hate, indifference, total unfamiliarity, etc.), 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, acquaint yourself with other works by that author
- reviews of major authors that fail to cite any of their earlier works are often inadequate and unpersuasive
- don't hesitate to enlist literary references, allusions, and aphorisms to enliven your argument

- read the book closely, and read it more than once; it shows if you don't
- heed the brief and the agreed length and deadline
- give prompt notice of any likely delay
- bring individuality and stylishness to the review
- lateness and infelicitous prose are guaranteed to shorten your career as a reviewer
- editors relish wit and irony – though not the comedy festival kind
- avoid the perpendicular pronoun; a review is not autobiography
- demonstrate literary competence, good grammar, and confidence with the subject matter
- if you really like – or dislike – a book, say so, and say why; don't be coy or overly circumspect
- 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, and exclamation marks
- if a sentence is making you seasick with its undulations, shorten it
- before submitting your review, read it aloud to yourself or someone whose judgement you trust; it's amazing what you will pick up
- if you submit timely, literate, well-proofed manuscripts, you'll be amazed by how much work comes your way
- remember, most magazines and newspapers have limited editorial resources and editors don't have time for two-hour edits
- demonstrate a sense of an 'organic' review, i.e. one emerging from careful appraisal, rather than from preconceptions or publicity material
- write reviews that are small works of art, not just consumer tools
- with major books, ones that have been reviewed extensively in the newspapers, submit reviews that add to 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
- 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!