

Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

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Guidelines for Book Reviewers

(Derived from an original by Avon Murphy, published in *Technical Communication*, Third Quarter 1994.)

Tell our readers what they need to know

- In the heading, identify the title, author, publisher, publication date, place of publication, special descriptive publication details (such as the book's place within a series), ISBN number (if one exists), number of pages, price and publication format.
- Tell readers the book's major points of information.
- Describe the book's overall structure.
- Provide a reasonable and adequately supported evaluation of the book's merits: why and how would readers use this book? Where possible, compare and contrast it with other sources.
- If the book includes an author biography, use it to create a closing section *About the author*.

Maintain objectivity

Remain fair-minded, praising where praise is due, while pointing out weaknesses that readers should know about. Use sufficient examples to show that evidence from the book has informed your evaluation.

Write clearly and economically

Even if the author being reviewed writes aimlessly, your own prose should always directly tell readers what they need to know about the book. Although you will find that most books can be discussed in 500 to 1,000 words, it's more important to adjust the length of a review to the content of the book. Include the details and analysis necessary to transmit the information.

Use models as appropriate

Study other reviews of technical publications to find good examples of how to handle explanatory detail, evaluative overviews and format.

Remember what we can't review

We publish reviews of books that have potential good value for our readers. There is no useful purpose in publishing a review that contains purely negative comments, as the reviewer is saying that the book does not have the required minimum value. If this is the case, record this fact concisely for the ISTC's records.

Submitting your review

The ISTC publishes book reviews in both its journal and newsletter. Please send your review in Word, plain text or RTF format to journal.editor@istc.org.uk or newsletter.editor@istc.org.uk as appropriate (or to the Book Review Manager if you were commissioned to write the review). If the book's author or publisher makes a table of contents or sample chapter available over the Internet, include the URL in your covering e-mail.

Note: *Communicator* copy deadlines are 31 January, 30 April, 31 July and 31 October.

We welcome your feedback and participation

Please feel encouraged to recommend to us books for ISTC review. In addition, if you haven't reviewed books for us before and would like to have a go, let us know, together with any areas of specialism (such as SGML, Web page design and desktop publishing packages).