

LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION

Reviewer Guidelines

Our goal is to offer our readers reviews with an important perspective: yours. Our reviewers are school librarians and other educators who work in the schools, public, and academic libraries. The editors seek reviewers who can write concise descriptions and evaluations of the contents, quality, and curricular applications of books and other media available for school library purchase.

Review readers are school librarians who look to the reviewers for informed recommendations on new books and media; teachers and other staff members in subscribers' schools; authors, publishers, and editors; and students.

When reviewing for **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION**, the single most important thing to keep in mind is your audience. Speak to your readers as you would to your colleagues at a preview committee meeting. Always assume your readers have not examined your review item.

The Review Process

Receiving Items for Review

The editors decide if material received from publishers is appropriate for review in **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION**. We try to send you 3-5 review items at a time. In order to publish reviews in a timely fashion, you may receive a galley copy. We will try to keep this to a minimum.

- **Please notify us immediately if you cannot meet an assigned deadline or review an item you've received. We always try to work with your schedule.**
- Our editorial office handles publisher requests for copies of your review. **Never send your unedited review to the publisher or any other source.**

Review Checklist

A **Review Checklist** will accompany each item sent to you. Fill in the information concerning purchase recommendation and grade levels, and check the technical/bibliographic information. **At the end of every review, please include your byline in this format: Name, Title, School Name, City, State.**

Bibliographic and Technical Information

Begin your review with the bibliographic/technical information. **Note that this information is provided on the Review Checklist** based on information provided to us by the publisher or

vendor. Please put all of this information at the top of your review. Please also verify the following:

Does it follow our bibliographic/technical format? (see **Bibliographic/Technical Guidelines for Reviewers** below)

- Is the information correct? If not, please change it on the review.
- Is the information complete? If not, please add any missing information.
- For series reviews, please include the author, title, and ISBN for all titles reviewed (even if they are not listed on the Review Checklist).

Refer to **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION** for review models. The following sections itemize points for different types of reviews. Please review all of the sections--the suggestions may be helpful for reviewing all formats.

Reviews must be less than 250 words and include both description and evaluation. Be sure to balance description of the content with evaluative statements. Reviews with an Additional Selection rating must be less than 150 words.

LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION Reviews

Please consider the following points as appropriate when writing reviews for **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION**:

- How will students benefit from the review item?
- To whom will the item appeal?
- Does the review item fit in with the school curriculum?
- Will it aid student learning or research?
- Will it enhance the professional reading collection?
- Does it fill a gap in available material on the topic?
- Are contents well organized and clear?
- Is the subject treated as an introduction? A general overview? An in-depth examination?
- What problems or issues are raised? And how well are they covered?
- Is the author's work accurate? Objective? Current? Is the author specifically qualified to write the book? Does the author accomplish any stated goals?
- Do the contents fall short of any marketing hype (such as found on jacket covers)?
- Will students have any problems comprehending the material?
- Are there Criticisms? If so, are they severe enough to hamper comprehension by American students? If a book is "Americanized" or a translation, is there adequate background to an unfamiliar culture? Will an international book help promote global literacy?
- Is the book a revised edition? If so, will those who own the previous title want to purchase this latest edition?
- Is print quality, layout (relationship of photos to text and text to page), or binding remarkable?
- Are there cross-references? Learning aids?
- If a publisher claims a book has library binding, is the binding truly durable?

- Are there gross editing errors? Typos? Technical errors?
- Is cover attractive? Dull?
- Are photos clear?
- Do photos or illustrations enhance and clarify the text? Do text and illustrations show gender and cultural diversity?
- What is the illustrator's style? What medium does the illustrator use? Are the style and medium appropriate to the text?

Remember . . .

- Do not use direct quotes from the book itself unless absolutely necessary to illustrate a point. If you need to quote, keep it brief. Never quote from a galley or pre-publication version of the book as publishers often change text from the galley to finished book.
- Comparisons to other books or products on the topic are welcome. (If you do refer to other titles within your review, include the author's full name, publisher, and publication date.)
- Suggestions for other library or classroom uses are helpful, such as teaching literary devices or as a discussion starter on an important theme or topic. ("This picture book contains several analogies and could be used to teach reading or language arts.")
- Information useful to librarians is welcome ("A good book for browsing").
- The item's features can be phrased at the end of the review's body rather than described in complete sentences (For example: Bibliography. Glossary. Index.).
- Include an evaluation of accompanying Web sites (see **Internet Resources (Free or Subscription Web Sites, Databases, Software or Books with Web Links, etc.)** below)
- Use descriptive adjectives ("detailed index" is more meaningful than "good index").
- Humor is welcome (but avoid cuteness and be clear).
- Several titles within a series can be evaluated within one review (see **Writing Reviews of Titles in a Series** below).
- Feel free to include suggestions for improvements. Publishers need feedback from the people who work with students ("An index could have aided research").
- Be fair. Avoid cruel criticism and undeserved praise.
- Make sure your evaluative comments support the Purchase Recommendation (see page 7) you give.

Writing Fiction Reviews

The following elements and questions to think about while evaluating a fiction title is by no means comprehensive, but meant as a guide to the reviewer.

- Balance information about the storyline with evaluative comments.
- Summarize the plot by giving enough information so that the reader understands what the book is about, but avoid detailing every situation or character that appears in the book. Tell the ending. **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION** reviews are written for the review reader, not the book reader. Include surprise twists and solutions to mysteries.
- Include the setting, time period, genre, and main character's age.
- Will the theme appeal to the targeted age group? Is it appropriate for that age group?

- Is the plot appropriate for the intended audience? Is the storyline clear? Is it too predictable? (Be fair to science fiction and fantasy plots. Can the author pull off a “real unreal?”)
- Is the writing style appropriate to the genre and reader’s age level? Describe the pacing of the story. Does the dialogue flow?
- What is the point of view? If the point of view shifts, do these changes enrich the story or will they confuse the reader?
- Are the characters believable and well-developed? Do they fit in the story? Will readers care about them?
- Evaluate the importance and impact of the setting. Does it enhance or distract from the story?
- What is your reaction to the story? It may help to obtain second opinions, especially from adolescents.
- When reviewing short stories or collections, indicate this format in the body of the review. Do not describe each story, but point out common themes, and titles that stand out for some reason.

Do not ignore potentially controversial content such as graphic sex, violence, excessive profanity, drug and alcohol use, racial defamation and stereotypes, child abuse, and cruelty to animals. **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION** aims to provide informative reviews for librarians of both public and private schools whose selections policies vary. We do not encourage censorship. The **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION** reviewing policy is to fully describe the book in order for school librarians to make informed selection judgments--no surprises. Controversial content does not need to affect your recommendation of a book. The entire book, the author’s literary intent, and the realities of life itself deserve a chance at weighing into a reader’s decision to select or not select material.

Writing Graphic Books Reviews

In addition to following the guidelines for fiction and non-fiction reviews, please consider the following points:

- Does the artwork pull the reader in and keep the story moving along? Does the art complement the story? Does the story complement the art?
- Are the pictures well integrated into the story? Does the artwork match the mood of the story?
- Does the panel and page layout advance the action? Does it help the reader move through the story?
- Does the story hold the reader’s interest? Does the story build to a climax?
- Are the illustrations and story appropriate and readable for the intended grade levels?

Writing Reviews of Titles in a Language Other Than English

In addition to following the guidelines for all reviews, please consider the following points:

- Is the text grammatically correct? Does it reflect the vernacular of the language? Is it appropriate for the intended grade level?
- Do illustrations reflect the reader’s culture and ethnicity?

- If appropriate, indicate how the item can be used in addition to its use for the language's native speaker. ("Students in beginning Spanish classes can use this book to increase their vocabulary.")

Writing Reviews of Titles in a Series

When reviewing several titles in a series, write one review for all titles received. In addition to following the guidelines for all reviews, reviewers should also:

- Include author, title, and ISBN for all titles received (even if they are not listed on the Review Checklist). Information that is the same for all titles in the series (such as copyright date, price, publisher, number of pages, and grade level) needs only to be entered once.
- Put the series title at the beginning of the bibliographic/technical information. It need not be repeated in the body of the review.
- Focus on similarities or differences in the format, coverage, illustrations, etc. in the series. ("Web sites are provided, except in the title on ancient Greece." "Each book follows the same format, beginning with a map identifying the specific animal's habitat.")
- Briefly mention topics covered by the individual titles evaluated or the series as a whole. ("Each title in this series covers one of the planets in our solar system." "The series explains key events in United States history.") Titles reviewed can be identified in the body of the review ("This reviewer saw *Earth*, *Venus*, and *The Moon*.")
- If specific information is given for any of the titles reviewed, limit it to one or two sentences. See page 10 for a sample series review.

Non-Books

It is important to include all necessary information so that the reader who has never seen the product can make a decision. A brief description of actual use by students, if possible, is helpful. However, try to avoid very detailed step-by-step explanations of installation or navigation of software.

Since most of our readers are educators, the most important information in your review relates to the value of the product in a school setting. This includes its curriculum connections, subject content, or ease of use by students and adults.

Software

Please consider the following additional points:

- Ease of installation. Include specific problems, if any.
- Hardware used for the review. If this does not meet producer's recommended minimum, how was performance affected? If it does meet or exceed recommended minimum, how did the product perform? Speed, video quality, etc.
- The purpose and capabilities of the product as stated by the producer and if it meets those claims.
- In your experience, how does it stack up against similar products? Briefly compare to specific titles when possible.

- How easy or difficult is it for students or adults to use? (Support with examples; i.e., ease of navigation, exiting from screens, search strategy, etc.) Comment on printing capabilities and ease.
- What type and quality of documentation is provided? What is the quality of the technical support service? If there is an 800 number, call it with a test question.
- Technical quality (i.e., quality of sound and video, screen set-up, etc.)
- Specific curriculum connections (examples or suggestions of classroom use). If possible, test product with students and include some student reactions.

Internet Resources (Free or Subscription Web Sites, Databases, Software or Books with Web Links, etc.)

Please consider the following additional points:

- URL needed, if any.
- Accessibility of the site. (Try the site several times during the trial period and at different times of the day, using the same links each time.)
- Any restrictions on access? Does subscription allow multiple simultaneous sign-on?
- Currency and depth of links (how far can you search a topic?)
- Credibility of content. Is the author or provider of information cited? What is their authority in this field?
- Ease of use, navigation, searching. Is the design of the site age appropriate?
- Is online the best format for this resource? How does it compare to its print counterpart, if there is one?
- Presence of advertising, if any.

Video

Please consider the following additional points:

- Running time in minutes
- Picture and sound quality
- Quality of narration (script and voice of narrator) and background music
- Accuracy of content (including charts, diagrams, simulations, etc.)
- Any accompanying print material

Additional Considerations for All Reviews

- Don't fill up a review with rambling or repetitive passages--say what you mean once then get on to your next point.
- Watch double or empty modifiers: "The lovely photography is excellent and it illustrates the subject well" does not say as much as "Professional photography clearly illustrates penguins and their environment."
- Avoid superlatives: "This book is a very good introduction to penguins." (Strike "very" and don't overuse "good.")
- Avoid gush: "This is an absolutely wonderful book!" (Readers mistrust gush.)

- Avoid jargon such as “This is a must purchase” or “...a good read.”
- Don’t assume your readers know what you know. Explain your references.
- Don’t rehash common knowledge within the body of the review. This is especially important with biographies: “Due to the Civil War, Lincoln’s presidency was difficult” is useless information in review writing. Rather, describe the treatment of the topic: “The author conveys Lincoln’s anguish over the Civil War by frequently using anecdotes and quotes.”
- Do give obscure subjects some background.
- Words like “tries/attempts,” “seems,” “perhaps,” and “maybe” are often ambiguous. If you can be definite, do so.
- Never copy from a press release, book jacket, or another review, not even one clever little adjective.

Recommending Grade Levels

We are interested in your opinion, not the publisher’s assessment. Specify grade levels such as “Grades 7-9,” “Grades 3-6,” “Grades K-2,” or “Grade 10 & Up” rather than age groups. Indicate if an item is on an adult or professional level.

If a book’s interest level is not the same as its reading level, then describe the reading level in the body of the review (e.g., “reluctant reader appeal” or “high interest/low level material”). When assigning wide spreads such as “Grades 4-12” or “Grades K-6,” there should be some explanation of this in the body of the review.

Remember to consider grade level appeal, not just calculated reading formulas.

Purchase Recommendation

- **Highly Recommended:** If the reader could afford only one title on this subject, and/or one fiction title in this genre, this is it. Excellent, superior in every way; should be included in all collections. (Use this rating sparingly.)
- **Recommended:** Consider seriously for inclusion in the collection.
- **Additional Selection:** For titles which may have more than a minor flaw OR a narrow focus, valuable only in the specific situation discussed in the review. Consider to meet the needs of the collection or as supplementary material. This rating does not detract from the quality of the product.
- **Not Recommended:** Contains serious flaws in content (ie. gross factual inaccuracies) and/or delivery. Although geared to K-12 school libraries, it is not appropriate for that audience.

When choosing a Purchase Recommendation please follow these descriptions. If you have indicated flaws in an item, even though it is still valuable for school use, do not use the Highly Recommended rating. It is helpful to the publisher, author, and readers to mention why an item is rated “Additional Selection” or “Not Recommended.” Please do not assign a “Not Recommended” rating to an item of quality only because it has little application in an elementary or secondary library. Such items should be rated “Additional Selection” with comments in the body of the review about its best audience (a large school with a big budget, a public or academic library, etc.). If you have any question about which rating to give, please indicate that on your review, and you will be contacted.

After the Review is Written

Please send by e-mail to **reviews@linworthpublishing.com**: copy and paste each review into a separate e-mail message, please do not send attachments. The subject line of your e-mail should include the title of your review. (For example: Review of *Traitor’s Gate*)

Terms

Review manuscripts are submitted for consideration with the understanding that Linworth, as a condition of acceptance for publication, requires assignment to Linworth of all rights in the accepted manuscript; requires a warranty that the work is original and not previously published, does not infringe any copyright or other right, and does not contain any matter that is libelous or otherwise unlawful; and reserves the right to edit accepted works to conform to house style and space limitations.

As a reviewer, you will receive a complimentary subscription to **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION**.
Review items are yours to keep.

Thank you for reviewing for **LIBRARY MEDIA CONNECTION!**

Bibliographic/Technical Guidelines for Reviewers

I. To structure your bibliographic heading, use the following general guidelines:

A. Books

- series name (if applicable)
- author's name (last, first)
- title of book
- editor or compiler (if no author)
- illustrator
- publication year
- number of pages (refer to the last page number in the book)
- price
- binding (lb., hc, pbk)
- publisher
- ISBN
- your recommended grade levels

B. For Nonbook Media

- title
- URL, if online resource
- year of release or year web site was accessed for review
- platform (Windows, Macintosh)
- format (CD-ROM, DVD, VHS)
- length of running time for videos/DVDs
- price (purchase & rental)
- distributor's or producer's name
- your recommended grade levels

II. Examples

A. *One book, single author*

Williams, Maiya

The Hour of the Cobra

2006. 272pp. \$16.95 hc. Amulet Books/Abrams. 0-8109-5970-4. Grade 7 & Up

B. *One book, part of a series*

Multicultural Crafts Kids Can Do!

Hartman, Sarah

Asian-American Crafts Kids Can Do!

2006. 32pp. \$22.60 hc. Enslow Elementary (Enslow Publishers, Inc.). 0-7660-2455-5.
Grades 2-6

C. Several titles in a series

Exploring Science: Life Science

Stille, Darlene R.

Erosion: How Land Forms, How It Changes. 978-0-7565-0854-8

Natural Resources. 978-0-7565-0856-2

Soil: Digging Into Earth's Vital Resource. 978-0-7565-0857-9

2006. 48pp. ea. \$25.27 ea. hc. Compass Point Books. Grades 5-7

D. One book, editor

Immigration in U. S. History

Edited by Carl L. Bankston III and Danielle Hidalgo. 2006. 2v. \$114 hc. Salem Press. 1-58765-266-8. Grade 7 & Up

E. Video

Getting to Know Simms Taback

2005. 15 min. \$59.95 Weston Woods (Scholastic, Inc.). Grades K-4

F. Software

Knowledge Adventure Reading Readiness, Teacher Edition

2005. \$89.95. Knowledge Adventure. Grades PreK-1

G. Online

Brainy Kids

www.dana.org/kids/. 2006. Free. The Dana Foundation. Grades 4-8

Sample Series Review

Drama of African-American History

Haskins, James and Kathleen Benson. ***Africa: A Look Back.*** 0-7614-2148-3

Jordan, Anne Devereaux and Virginia Schomp. ***The Civil War.*** 0-7614-2179-3

Jordan, Anne Devereaux and Virginia Schomp. ***Slavery and Resistance.*** 0-7614-2178-5

Sharp, S. Pearl and Virginia Schomp. ***The Slave Trade and the Middle Passage.*** 0-7614-2176-9

Stroud, Bettye and Virginia Schomp. ***The Reconstruction Era.*** 0-7614-2181-5

2007. 80pp. ea. \$34.21 ea. lb. Benchmark Books (Marshall Cavendish). Grades 4-9

Liberally sprinkled with photographs and colored illustrations from archives, including full-page illustrations, bordered pages, and attractive sidebars, this series will visually appeal to students. Large fonts, colored subheadings, and generous margins contribute to the visual appeal. Teachers will appreciate the emphasis on primary sources, with quotes on almost every page, and large blocks of inset quotations supporting the text. Each volume includes a wide range of perspectives. In *The Reconstruction Era*, for example, it ranges from the well known, such as W. E. B. DuBois and Frederick Douglass, to lesser-known females, such as Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, the “wife of a wealthy North Carolina planter.” Each volume includes an introduction, a glossary, further reading suggestions, a bibliography, and index. The inclusion of so much primary source materials, both visual and written, makes this series a useful addition for research. **Highly Recommended.** *Lori Robinson, Smyrna (Delaware) High School Librarian*

Updated: 3/28/07