

Guidelines for the Book Report

Semester 1

The written book report will be handed as you give your oral presentation of the texts you chose to read for the first semester. It serves as the basis for your oral presentation, and will enable you to structure your presentation, get the gist of what you want to say, make sure you have the language to say it. Yet it is also a written document, which needs to be scrupulously presented and scripted. The attention given to the presentation, both oral and written, to the quality of your expression, to the professionalism of your document, will be part of your final evaluation.

1 - Preparing the book report

- Selection:

Select two of the books from the list, based on the few words of presentation meant to help you do so according to your interests, tastes, preferences, or spirit of readerly adventure and curiosity. Doing a little research online may help learning more on some of the texts, and prepare for your reading.

- Reading:

The first step is indeed to read the texts. Have an English dictionary at hand to help you with the words you have a hard time identifying from context. Do not check every unknown word though, that might prove a tedious task. Try to understand from context, or get a general idea of the meaning of the word. For older texts, you may want to read a French version when available (for the Shakespeare plays for instance), to get a general idea of the plot and story, then go to the English text. Some of the texts have film/tv adaptations that you may want to check and that may help get a general idea of the contents: watch the film, then go to the text to see how the filmmaker read the book, what it was attracted his/her attention, and see if you see other aspects of the book.

- Making notes:

Mark important passages, make notes of the main characters, events, moments, take down important quotes: that will help you bring out the elements that you consider as most striking, and identify some of the main themes / ideas / points of the text.

2 - Writing the book report

Language:

English

Format:

- Printed. No handwritten reports will be accepted.
- 1000 words tops. Include wordcount at the end of your paper.
- The report will be written in **paragraphs**, clearly separated from one another. A paragraph consists, mostly, of several sentences, united in terms of topics. Generally speaking, aside from specific parts (the introduction, which paragraphs present the matter to be discussed, or the conclusion, which wraps up the general presentation and opens new perspectives), a paragraph develops an idea, that is first introduced, then expanded upon, using examples and references to support it.

Presentation:

Your paper must clearly identify:

- Your name (first and last)
- The academic year in which it is written

- The title of the book, year of publication and name of the author. An illustration is possible, but not compulsory. Typographical requirements must be respected: the title of the book will be *italicized*, with all important words Capitalized. See the reading list in case of doubt.
- The number of pages of the original text (for printed books)
- The time it took you to read it in English (approximately) / Whether you also read in in French

Structure:

A book report must capture the specificity of a book, explain the reason why it is of interest, and give your personal view on the text, what you found engaging, but also may be what you had trouble with – be it ideas, scenes, characters, themes, ideology.

It is not very different from a book review, and can serve as training to the writing / scripting of book reviews (a popular genre on Youtube). As such, it must address an audience that needs to be told about the book, and advised about reading it (or not).

Make sure to separate the different parts by a blank line, to make the structure of your report clear to the naked eye. You can give them titles.

Introduction:

- One paragraph
- Introduce the text chosen: give its title, author, date of publication. You may say the reason why you chose it (because you'd heard about it, because of the summary in the list, because of the subject, because it seemed an easy read, because you love the genre / the type of story, because the cover was enticing... there can be lots of reasons). Explain what it is (novel, play, story, pamphlet...), the genre it belongs in (if pertinent), and why it is worthy of attention (which can be: because it was very successful, because it expresses innovative / complex ideas, because it was very influential, because it changed things in art or society, because it made an impression, because it captured a moment/mood, and many other reasons). This can take up to two or three sentences.

Summary:

- One paragraph
- Try to sum up the book in the most efficient manner. You are not asked to give the details of the action, but to capture the gist of the text. This can be tricky, when plots are very eventful, or present many characters. But try to make the summary as synthetic as possible, so as to capture the essential contents of the text. This may mean re-writing the paragraph a number of times, to get the proper balance. Remember: you are addressing someone who has not necessarily read the book, and who must understand what is most important about the book. Sometimes, going with ideas, themes, may be more efficient than just trying to fit all the plot elements of a story into a handful of sentences.

Striking features:

- One or more paragraphs
- Develop on what you consider the most striking features of the book. You may select 2 or 3, no more than 5 if you want to stay in format. They can be elements of plot, theme, style, aesthetic, ideas, innovations, surprise... For each point, refer to a specific passage (chapter, scene, moment) in the book that is pertinent to the point you are developing, selecting a quote (clearly identified and quoted, with page number unless you read on Gutenberg Project, but give chapter/scene information then).

Critical assessment:

- One paragraph
- Consider how, in light of what you said, the book comes out as important, striking, capital, and why. Do you think you have learned from the book, and what (from ideas, to the discovery of new forms, to vocabulary, to perspectives on the subjects raised, etc...) It is also the place to say if you consider the book has flaws, shortcomings, or on the contrary if you consider it as a great achievement.

Conclusion:

- One paragraph
- Your conclusion should draw from the features you highlighted about the book. This is the place where to comment on your appreciation of the book: did you enjoy reading it / working on it (sometimes, working on a book brings rewards just reading the book may not have afforded), and why? Was it a good / a bad surprise for you? Was the reading fluid, or complicated, and why? Say if you would recommend reading the book and why.

Proofreading:

Proofreading is absolutely necessary for your book report. Ideally, it will be done a few days after you have completed the report, so that you can read what you wrote, not what you think you did.

Proofreading will pay attention to:

- the quality of the language. When you are trying to express your ideas, make sure the words you use actually exist in the English language, and mean what you think they do. An English dictionary will be very helpful there.
- the quality of the syntax. Make sure not to write too long sentences, and that your subjects match your verbs in terms of number, that the punctuation is right, etc. Remember the basics of grammar, how to use modal verbs, how to conjugate verbs, what tenses to use when, ...
- the clarity of the argumentation. Are ideas clearly connected? Will a reader get the logics and articulation in your paragraphs? (hence the necessity to proofread your text a few days after writing it. Sometimes proofreading your text will show that your connections are not very clear, for instance, once you've forgotten why you wrote the succession of sentences you now read)

→ **Tip** : get a fellow student to proofread your text, and proofread his/hers. Having somebody read your text may alert you to inconsistencies, difficulties, and mistakes. It is always easier to spot mistakes and shortcomings in somebody else's text, because then you see whether the logics works or not. Which means also that somebody else will alert you to the possible shortcomings of your reports. Team up with somebody who may have chosen different texts, and discuss your texts, which may help you also refine your arguments.

Drafts:

You may need to return to your report several times, to make sure that it is the best you can do. So make sure you start working on your report early enough to have time to return to it, proofread it, and have it proofread by a fellow student.

Preparing for the oral presentation

The oral presentation is 15 minutes long altogether.

It needs to leave time for questions.

Which means you have 5 minutes tops to present each book.

The oral presentation is not a rote repeating of the written report: it should be a distillation of that report. You will not have your book report before you for the presentation: it will be handed before the oral starts.

So, for the oral presentation, here is what you should do:

- prepare a note card for each text. No sentences: only items, the language and ideas will come back as you wrote all this down in the written report.
- on each card, write down
 - the general information on the book : date of publication, genre, reason for interest
 - main points you want to make
 - main points of your assessment : what you liked, did not like

If you worked on your written report, the reasons for all of these choices and opinions will return back to you, in the language you used on paper to clarify your points.

Rehearse:

If you teamed up with a fellow student / students, a good idea may be to rehearse you oral presentation, to make sure you manage to stick to 4-5 minutes per book. Another trick is to record yourself to see how you manage, and make sure you come prepared to the oral, confident as to what you want to say, without written notes.

Further resources

You will find multiple resources online to help you with the writing of book reports.

Check, for instance :

- Videos:
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qN9jAwR_JqU
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpVP4FNbGN0>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsotvB6mnfc>
- Websites:
 - <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-write-a-great-book-report-1857643>

Enjoy your reading (this is the point of this task), make sure you make your interest in the texts perceptible, and just get ready for an enthusiastic discussion on your reading. We want you to have as much fun as you can reading historical and literary texts, to get in touch with the past and the present, travel through time and space to the places from which authors, of all genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds, have written, in very different circumstances.

For any question, write to: Emmanuelle Delanoë-Brun (delanoee@univ-paris-diderot.fr)

Just make sure you have a clear Object to your message, otherwise it will be ignored. If Emmanuelle Delanoë-Brun hasn't answered in a couple of days, write again, your mail might just have been lost in the avalanche we get every day. Also be careful in your presentation and formulation in your mail: formality is required, so a "Dear Madam" is required to begin your mail, and proper salutations in the end, together with general attention to the quality of your writing.

If you intend to read a book outside the reading list (another novel/text by the authors listed, or a classic not listed), clear it with Mme Delanoë-Brun first.