

## Oral History Review

# Book Review Writing Guidelines

Thank you for offering your time and expertise in reviewing for the *Oral History Review*. These guidelines explain our philosophy and our expectations, then provide a workflow of the review process and instructions for writing and formatting your review. The *Writing Reviews for OHR* welcome page has helpful information and a link to these guidelines, <http://oralhistoryreview.org/writing-reviews/>.

The *OHR* reviews books we believe will interest our readers. Though most books explore traditional oral history practice, theory, and pedagogy, we also review works at the boundaries of the field, such as oral history associated with performance studies, community activism, qualitative research, curation, cultural heritage, ethnography, and public history. Sometimes we review books that seem to be about oral history but turn out not to be at all, which challenges us to think about our own work from an outsider's lens.

### *The Reviewer's Commitment*

Your review means a great deal to our readers, the scholarly community at-large, the author of the book, and, of course, to us, the *OHR* editorial team. We could not function without you. For this reason, please take your commitment seriously. *Once you agree to review a book, we expect you to follow through on your commitment.* If you find you can't meet the due date, don't worry. Just contact the editor for an extension, and we'll find a date that works for us both.

If you find you need to drop the review for any reason, please return the book as soon as possible, so that we can assign it to another reviewer. No hard feelings, but we want to make sure the book gets reviewed. Return the book to this address for reassignment:

Oral History Review  
c/o David Caruso, editor  
Science History Institute  
315 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
U.S.A.

Sometimes we misjudge a book and its relevance for *OHR* readers. If you receive a book that you think is inappropriate for the journal or does not match your expertise, please contact the book review editor, Nancy MacKay, at [ohrbookreviews@gmail.com](mailto:ohrbookreviews@gmail.com).

### *Workflow at a Glance*

Book reviews should be 700-1,000 words in length. We generally assign a three- to six-month writing period, but the due date is flexible.

Here is an overview of steps, from your book selection to published review.

1. *Create a Reviewer Profile here*, <https://goo.gl/forms/J5e5Z5HZ9ReAm70U2>. All reviewers must complete this form before we assign the review and send you the book. You only need to complete the form once or when your profile needs an update.
2. *Select the book*. Most reviewers choose books from our online book selection page here, <http://oralhistoryreview.org/books/>. Once we receive your online request submitted from this page, we will send you a review copy of the book to the address you provide in the Reviewer Profile form. If you select a book from the *OHR* display table at the Oral History Association conference, just fill out the enclosed paper form and take the book home with you.
3. *Read this document*. Please review these guidelines before you begin reading your book and once again before writing the review.
4. *Read the book*. This is the fun part!
5. *Write the review*. This is the hard part and what we value most in your efforts. Write the review according to the content guidelines in the next section. Then follow the formatting guidelines in the section below to prepare the document according to *OHR* specifications. Send it to [ohrbookreviews@gmail.com](mailto:ohrbookreviews@gmail.com) as an attachment. Use the subject line: "Book review: [your name]."
6. *Review and approve the edited version*. *OHR* editors will go over your review and usually make some suggestions. We will return it to you with suggestions indicated in MS Word Track Changes. Please review the document and make the changes indicated or respond to us why you think the changes should not be made. Return the edited review to the *OHR* editor at the email address above. If everything looks good, the editor will sign off on the review and forward it to the copy editor for final editing and typesetting.
7. *Sign License-to-Publish document*. Right before publication you will receive a license-to-publish document from Oxford University Press, the *OHR* publisher. By signing this document, you give your approval to publish the review and transfer copyright to Oxford University Press.

### About the Timeline

Authors and reviewers are often surprised and disappointed that it takes so long for a review of a new book appear in print. So are we, and we do everything within our control to narrow the gap between book publication and review publication. But most of the delay has to do with the nature of scholarly publishing and is beyond our control.

First, scholarly publishing focuses on quality rather than speed, and quality requires many layers of review and approval, even for book reviews. Second, the editorial staff at *OHR* (and probably most scholarly journals) are volunteers and must juggle time for the journal among many responsibilities. Third, *OHR* is published only twice a year with a production cycle requiring final submissions months in advance of print publication. If your book review doesn't make it through the editing process in time for one production deadline, it must wait for the next, six months later.

All this is to say that we do our best to assign books for review shortly after publication, and to move your completed review through the editorial process as quickly as possible. Even so, it is not unusual for a review to be published a year after submission. We all – authors, publishers, OHR editors, and reviewers – are working toward the same goal of a timely publication of the review that meets our high standards for quality.

## Content Details

OHR book reviews should be written in a formal style commonly used in scholarly journals. The style can include humor, irony, or playfulness, as long as the writing remains within the bounds of scholarly writing standards. Avoid incomplete sentences, contractions, and exclamation points. Be careful not to use language that could give offense to our diverse community of readers. OHR uses the *Chicago Manual of Style, 17<sup>th</sup> ed.*, and the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate and Unabridged* dictionaries as the designated authorities for writing style.

The body of the review should utilize description, analysis, and evaluation to construct a thoughtful, in-depth overview of the book with OHR readers in mind.

**Description** is a straightforward recounting or summary of the contents of the book. It can be organized sequentially, chapter by chapter, or thematically. The description forms a significant part of the review but does not constitute a review by itself.

**Analysis** refers to the breaking-down of a topic into smaller parts in order to explain a complex concept. It is fine to draw on your own expertise of the topic and use examples from real life or other written sources. Analysis is an expository process and does not include value judgment.

**Evaluation** does require judgment. It consists of a thoughtful opinion, pro and con, of the book's merit and significance, backed with illustrations or evidence from the reviewer's expertise or research and on the author's success in achieving the goal in writing the book. It is fine to offer constructive criticism, but it should be balanced and supported by evidence and examples.

Use these three writing approaches together or separately to form the body of your review.

## Other Considerations

Address these points, when appropriate, in your review:

*Relation to existing scholarship.* Consider how the book fits into the existing body of literature. Does it cover new material? A new approach? Does it challenge existing thought? Does it update existing literature? Do some research if you are unsure and include full citations for books you mention.

*Author's qualifications.* Mention the author's relationship to the subject and her or his qualifications in writing the book. This section need not be lengthy, but some mention will help readers understand the author's perspective.

*How the author uses oral history.* How is oral history used to further the author's thesis? How extensive is the author's discussion of methodology? Does the author conduct interviews or draw on

archival interviews, or both? How does the author's methodology line up with OHA best practices and principles? How are narrators' voices presented in the book, and how successful is it? A discussion of the book through the lens of oral history is an important component of every review and is what makes *OHR* reviews unique in the larger body of scholarly literature.

Remember, not all the books we review employ oral history methodology. If the author uses oral history peripherally or not at all, comment on the fact, but evaluate the book on the basis of the author's success in supporting his or her thesis.

*Examples and quotes.* Choose quotations and examples from the book to support the points you make in your review, give readers a sample of the author's writing style, and add interest to the review. Don't go overboard: examples from the book should be few and carefully selected to support your main job of providing a critical analysis of the book.

*Book formatting and organization.* Comment on any special features you find noteworthy, such as illustrations, end matter, or links to online content. Comment on the usefulness of resources, bibliography, and notes.

*Why the book will interest OHR readers.* A useful way to end the review is to comment on how the book should be of special interest to *OHR* readers. Does it present an interesting use of narrators' voices to tell a big story of a community event or social movement? Does it use interviews to tell a single life story? Is it intended to raise awareness about a social injustice or a little-known point in history? Does it focus on methodology? Would the book be particularly good for a classroom text?

## Formatting Details

Please follow these instructions for formatting your book review. Our editorial staff can tweak the piece, but the more closely your review follows our format specifications, the quicker we can process your review for publication.

### Setting Up the Document

Set the document for Times New Roman typeface at twelve-point font size, double-spaced, and one-inch margins. The first paragraph of the review is not indented; subsequent paragraphs are indented. There are no additional carriage returns between paragraphs. Do not number the pages of the document.

### Book Citation

Publication details for your book should appear at the top of the review in the format that follows. This information is extremely helpful to our broad-based readership, so we include an expanded citation to help readers identify the book. Most of the required information is inside the book in your hand, but we would appreciate your visiting the publisher's website for details about other versions of the book. Please use this format for the citation (the examples are easier to follow than the citation specification):

[*Book title*]: [*Book subtitle*]. By [author/editor names as they appear on the title page]. [Edition, if indicated]. [Place of publication]: [Publisher name], [publication date]. [# pages] pp. [ISBN for book in hand] ([hardcover/softcover/electronic], [list price (from book or publisher's website)]). Other formats

available: Softbound, \$##.##, ISBN ###-#-####-#####; hardbound, \$##.##, ISBN ###-#-####-#####; e-book, \$##.##, ISBN ###-#-####-#####.

#### EXAMPLE 1 – Single author/editor

*One Job Town: Work, Belonging, and Betrayal in Northern Canada.* By Steven High. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. 380 pp. 978-1-4426-10231 (Softcover) \$39.95. 978-1-4426-40832 (Hardcover) \$90.00. 978-1-4875-18677 (e-Book) \$39.95.

#### EXAMPLE 2 – Multiple author/editors

*The Public History Reader.* Edited by Hilda Kean and Paul Martin. London: Routledge, 2013. 348 pp. 978-0-415-52041-6 (Softcover) \$57.95. 978-0-415-520409 (Hardcover) \$165.00.

#### EXAMPLE 3 – New edition

*Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences.* By Valerie Raleigh Yow. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. 425 pp. 978-0-7591-2267-3 (Softcover) \$43.00. 978-0-7591-2266-6 (Hardcover) \$106.00. 978-0-7591-2268-0 (e-Book) \$40.50.

#### EXAMPLE 4 – Self-published

*Los Alamos Revisited: A Workers' History.* By Peter Malmgren and Kay Matthews. El Prado, NM: Wink Books, 2017. 225 pp. 978-0-9973950-2-0 (Softcover) \$18.00. contact: [petermalmgrenm@gmail.com](mailto:petermalmgrenm@gmail.com).

### Quoting from the book

OHR uses inline references rather than endnotes in reviews. *Cite only direct quotations from the book, not paraphrases or references.* Citations for direct quotations (page numbers only) appear in parentheses at the end of the sentence within which the citation is made; use commas to separate the citations to multiple quotes from different pages in the same sentence, according to these examples:

#### Needs citation

The main thrust of the author's theory is that "oral history is a methodology that opens the door to many unknowable stories," which do not appear in the traditional written records historians use but are "essential for truly understanding how individuals navigated" important historical events (12, 15).

#### Does not need citation since it isn't a direct quote:

The author uses this text to explicate the multifaceted experiential framework within which, for example, these presumed outsiders were intricately woven into the fabric of this fractured culture.

### References

Do not use footnotes or endnotes in the review. References to works other than the book being reviewed generally follow format rules for footnotes of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, with the exception that square brackets are used instead of parentheses around the facts of publication (place, publisher name, and publication date) when the title of the referenced work is included inside the citation. The following are a few examples:

1. In Michael Frisch's *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990)...."
2. As Michael Frisch (*A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990]) already made clear...."
3. Valerie Yow ("Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research," *Oral History Review* 22, no. 1 [1995]: 51-66) discusses this very issue.
4. Thinking about the relationship between oral history and biography, Valerie Yow ("Biography and Oral History," in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas Charlton, Rebecca Sharpless, and Lois Myers [Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006], 425-464) notes that...

### Your Name

The review concludes with the reviewer's name and institutional affiliation in italics, right justified, like these examples.

Elsa M. Chang  
*University of North Carolina, Greensboro*

Sunil Chesla  
*Independent Scholar*



### Helpful links:

Nancy MacKay, OHR Book Review editor, [ohrbookreviews@gmail.com](mailto:ohrbookreviews@gmail.com)

Janneken Smucker, Media and Non-Print Project Review Editor, [JSmucker@wcupa.edu](mailto:JSmucker@wcupa.edu). Contact Janneken for details.

Welcome page for OHR book reviews, <http://oralhistoryreview.org/writing-reviews/>

Books currently available for review, <http://oralhistoryreview.org/books/>

Update Reviewer Profile, <https://goo.gl/forms/J5e5Z5HZ9ReAm70U2>

Suggest a book or media work to be reviewed, <https://goo.gl/forms/4aogROMiIXBYUgj13>

*Five Questions About a Book* series on the OHR blog, features brief interviews with authors of books reviewed in OHR, <http://oralhistoryreview.org/category/5-questions-about-a-book/>

Oral History Association, <http://www.oralhistory.org/>

OHA Principles and Best Practices, <http://www.oralhistory.org/oha-principles-and-best-practices/>