

# Guidelines for JASA/TAS Book Reviewers

## Procedural Matters

- 1) **Contact Information.** Please be sure that the Associate Editor has your mailing addresses (both postal and electronic) and telephone number. If you deem the book unworthy of a review in *JASA/TAS*, please communicate this directly and immediately with the Associate Editor.
- 2) **Review Length.** The AE will let you know what length of review is requested for the book. Please let the AE know if you disagree with the recommendation. Important books should receive longer, more careful reviews, while less important or specialized books should get shorter reviews. Generally, a short review is 1 – 2 double spaced manuscript pages, a medium review is 3 – 4 pages, and a long review is 6 – 8 pages. The occasional book that seems especially important may warrant a longer review that begins with an overview of recent developments on the topic.
- 3) **Review Article?** Some books can serve as a springboard for a review article of a field. If this avenue seems appealing, discuss feasibility with the Editor. Also, if you are reviewing a graduate level research book as a ‘topical expert’, you can suggest an additional review by a ‘layman to be named later’ to the Associate Editor if the book also appears to impact a more pedestrian audience.
- 4) **Deadlines.** Please observe the deadlines agreed upon with the Associate Editor. Timely book reviews are much more useful to *JASA/TAS* readers, and the production process introduces a six-month delay after your review is received. If it turns out that you cannot complete your review by the deadline, please contact the Associate Editor so that the book can be rescheduled or reassigned.

## Technical Matters

- 1) **Review Format.** The publishers of *JASA/TAS* prefer reviews in the L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X format. There is an easy-to-use L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X template made for *JASA/TAS* Reviews. The Associate Editor can email you the L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X typesetting template, or you can download it from

<http://magazine.amstat.org/bookreviews>.

If you are L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X resistant, we will accept reviews in most formats if pressed. However, our technical typesetter will need to convert it to L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X afterwards, so please don’t use obscure typesetting software. A .txt file is our preferred L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X alternative.

- 2) **Where to Send the Review.** Please send the review to the Associate Editor (AE) handling the book via e-mail. No formal letters are necessary, but attachments with names suggesting what the file contains as well as what type of file (e.g., JASAReviewofSmith.tex, JASAReviewofSmith.pdf) are appreciated. (In some cases, the Editor directly handles the review process.) The AE will get back to you with any points that might need clarification before sending it to the Editor.
- 3) **Editorial Revisions.** All reviews are subject to editorial revision. Because space is at a premium, reviews may be condensed. You will be contacted only when the AE suggests substantial changes. The *JASA/TAS* production staff may make further editorial revisions to conform to *JASA/TAS* standards and style. They will contact you directly with galley proofs if deemed necessary. Please be sure to read through page proofs carefully, as occasionally editorial changes can result in subtle alterations of meaning.

4) **Copyright and Disclosure Forms.** Prior to publication, you must complete and return both a Copyright Transfer form and a Disclosure form. You can download these forms at

<http://magazine.amstat.org/bookreviews>.

Please make sure that you complete the forms for the correct journal. We cannot sign a copyright transfer form on your behalf. If you expect to be unavailable by e-mail for any length of time before your review appears, please notify either the *JASA/TAS* Publications Office or the Reviews Editor to ensure that page proofs reach you without delay.

5) **Miscellaneous.** The page number(s) for any quotation from the book must be given in the text of the review. *JASA/TAS* does not allow footnotes. Format for citations and references is given in *JASA's* Style Guide at

<http://www.amstat.org/publications/style-guide.html>

Alternatively, refer to recent *JASA/TAS* issues.

6) **Thanks!** The book is yours to keep. You also have our undying gratitude for writing the review.

<b>Conflicts of Interest</b>
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You may be invited to review a book when there is a real or apparent conflict of interest. For instance, the author of the book may be a colleague or a former student, or you may have written a competing book. Please avoid even the semblance of an unacknowledged conflict that could cast the integrity of your review into doubt or undermine the *JASA/TAS* reputation for scholarly fairness (ahem!). The Editor and Associate Editors cannot possibly know all circumstances and relationships; discuss any questionable situation with the Editor or Associate Editor.

# Writing Good Reviews

## Overall

Writing a good book review is not overly hard, but there is an art. Good book reviews frequently resemble good movie reviews. Tell the reader about the story line and plot (what the book is about), identify the characters (how the book addresses its subject), and how the book impacted you. A review should be accurate and informative, but it is also understood to be an opinion...and *JASA/TAS* Reviews wants a candid opinion. Try to make the review lively and interesting; some past reviewers have even employed light humor and metaphors. You may wish to consult earlier issues of *JASA/TAS* for examples of content, style, and length in recently published reviews.

It is essential that reviews be comparative and evaluative. Compare the book to established, well-known books on the topic. Help the *JASA/TAS* reader decide whether to beg, borrow, buy, or steal the book or whether the book should start the Sunday night fire.

Whereas the review should provide a first approximation in a few pages to what the book does in a few hundred, you can also use the review to help keep readers in touch with important developments in statistical science.

Issues previous reviewers have frequently addressed are the following:

- 1) Is this an important book? Does it fill a needed niche?
- 2) Is the book novel in some way? What is the quality of the book? Are there many errors, either typographical or substantive?
- 3) What background is required of the reader; i.e., what level of mathematics, statistics, or field of application is assumed?
- 4) Is the book worth its price? If the book is a new edition, how does it differ from the previous edition(s)? Would you advise purchasing the new edition even if one already has the earlier version?
- 5) Is the book intended as a course text? If so, at what level (undergraduate/graduate)? Should an instructor consider adopting it? Would you teach from it? Are there exercises and solutions or a teacher's manual or other supplemental teaching materials? How does this text compare with similar previously published texts?

Your review should contain your opinion of the book. *JASA/TAS* Reviews has no policy requiring you to show your review to the author(s) or publisher before publication. Other reviews of the same book may exist (older editions of *JASA/TAS*, Amazon.com, other journals). Your opinion need not coincide with past reviews; indeed, we prefer statistically reviews.

## Negative Reviews

Suppose that you really hate the book. What should you say? Negative reviews don't need to be long; after all, a bad book doesn't deserve much space. Typically, readers migrate to negativity as it's more controversial (interesting). Whereas reviewers should be clear when they don't like a book, they need not discuss all of the book's faults. Talk about similar books that you like better, or mention the topics or approach that you would have liked to have seen, but didn't. One type of negativity that is best avoided is criticism over topics the book was not intended to address. For

example, I recall a reviewer castigating Sheldon Ross's classic introductory text *A First Course in Probability* for the 'silly mistake' of not defining random variates as Borel measurable functions.

### **Positive Reviews**

Suppose that you like the book. Be sure to say this, but realize that the most positive review still takes a critical stance at times. The reader will detect that you put the book to the test, and that it passed. In general, brief reviews containing subjective opinions are preferred to longer reviews that narrate topical contents. Indeed, few read details in long book reviews.

### **Neutral Reviews**

In addition to the characteristics noted above for Positive and Negative reviews, be sure to point out the good and bad aspects of the book.

### **Concluding Comments**

- 1) Any book, good or bad, is the product of a gargantuan effort by its authors. Before submitting your review, try to read it from the author's perspective; you're talking about their child.
- 2) Invariably, one may question whether the whole book must be read to write an effective review. Candidly, the answer is no. Some books are very technical and a Herculean effort would be required to do such. No reviewer is expected to check all proofs line by line. This given, we do expect reviewers to read enough of the book to be able to write an informative review.
- 3) Some useful book review writing references and links are:

Drewry, John (1974). *Writing Book Reviews*, Greenwood Press, Westport CT, Call # PN 98.B7 D776.

Teitelbaum, Harry (1989). *How to Write Book Reports*, Prentice Hall, New York City, Call # PE 1478 T265.

<http://kml.uindy.edu/reference/bookreview.html>

<http://www.lavc.edu/Library/bookreview.htm>

[http://www.keyano.ca/college\\_resources/library/htdocs/handouts/htdocs/book\\_reviewing.htm](http://www.keyano.ca/college_resources/library/htdocs/handouts/htdocs/book_reviewing.htm)

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