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## UNIT 15 – BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

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### 15.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Explain what a review is
- Distinguish between the features of a good review and a bad review
- Understand how to summarise and paraphrase effectively
- Develop a frame for writing a review
- Explore the tenses used in review writing
- Develop the appropriate vocabulary for writing a review

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### 15.1 WARM-UP

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Imagine that you are going out to watch a movie at a theatre. There is a new movie being released at the theatre but you don't know the actors or the story. You haven't seen its advertisement. How do you decide to watch such a movie? Circle the factors that will help you decide if you want to spend your money watching this unfamiliar movie.

- ask your friends
- decide that the movie isn't worth spending money on
- look online to read discussions on it
- check trailers on YouTube
- find out about the actors
- don't do anything
- find out the ratings in the form of stars or ★□
- write down three other steps that you might take for finding out more about the movie
  - i.
  - ii.
  - iii.

The steps that you opted for above can be considered as part of a review.

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## 15.2 READING: WHAT IS A REVIEW?

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What is a review? A review, according to the Cambridge Dictionary is, “to think or talk about something again, in order to make changes to it or to make a decision about it”. Once you understand the basic purpose of writing a review, you can review anything, but the organisation, vocabulary, structure, and length will differ depending on whether you are reviewing an academic book or article, a movie, a dish or a TV show.

A review can be written about various kinds of written work – fiction, non-fiction, newspaper article, journal article, and academic writing among others. A review of a piece of literature is a type of writing that is called literary criticism. A good review is when a text or the material is evaluated on different criteria. One has to be critical while evaluating it. ‘Evaluation’ is not simply a matter of deciding if the information is right or wrong. In evaluation, you have to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the material keeping in mind a few criteria like, purpose of the material, content of the material, who is the audience of the material, its structure or production and other such points.

It is very important to use a critical lens while writing a review. Criticism is not a totally negative word or exercise. Being critical means that you have to question the opinions and information and then evaluate them. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “criticism” (noun) is the “act of giving your opinion or judgment about the good or bad qualities of something or someone especially books, movies, performance, food” and so on. Criticism can be either constructive or destructive.

Book reviews can be descriptive or critical. Descriptive reviews simply summarise a book or material, but a critical review is more than a simple summary. A good book review is not a summary of the content or simply your own opinion of it or stating the storyline in a short article. The purpose of writing a review is to help other readers/watchers/buyers (in other words consumers) decide whether they would want to read/see/buy something or not. For example, a good book review describes, only briefly, the plot or the content of the book but it takes more time to analyse the ways in which the author tries to achieve his/her purpose. A book or material is analysed on the basis of its content, views presented, style of writing, facts and importance of the work. If the book has suspense in it, then a reviewer should not reveal the surprise or the hidden plot. If possible, the review should highlight what is unique in the material. Thus, book review writing uses the skills of describing the what, analysing the how and expressing your own responses/reactions.

### Check your progress 1

1. Mark these statements true or false based on your understanding of the reading passage:

1. Criticism is always negative.
2. The purpose of a book review is to simply describe the content.
3. Constructive criticism is positive criticism.
4. Constructive criticism helps in the process of improvement by giving well-reasoned opinions in a friendly manner.

5. A review helps a customer in deciding whether or not to make use of a product.
6. Evaluation means giving a judgment whether a particular material is good or bad.

2. Use your own words to answer the questions below. Write your answers in the space given below.

1. Give three features of a good review

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

2. Give three features of an ineffective book review.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

3. What is the purpose of writing a review?

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 .....  
 .....

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### 15.3 WRITING A GOOD REVIEW

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**Instead of us giving you the features of a good review, we would like you to decide what a good review could be. So please attempt the activity given below.**

**Check your progress 2**

Read the short note on Review Writing in Section 15.2. Use the passage to infer or form your views on the features of good book review writing. Read the various features listed below. Put them under the category of Good Review Writing or Bad Review Writing.

1. Review is about expressing personal opinions about the author of the book.
2. Review should cover every detail mentioned in the book.
3. Review is evaluation of a book/material.
4. Review is a commentary on a material.
5. Review is not for public circulation.
6. Review has to be well organized.
7. Reviewer should be familiar with the material that he/she is reviewing.

Features of Good Review	Features of Bad Review

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In Check your Progress 2, we identified the features of good and bad reviews based on the text given in Section 15.2. In some ways, we used the skills of inference and deduction to formulate our understanding of the features of good and bad reviews. The process of writing a review for anything is similar. A review is like a dialogue between the audience and the creator of the work. The tone, subject and style of a review can vary depending on the reviewer, but academic reviews share some common features:

1. A review gives a concise summary of the content, which includes a relevant description of the topic. It should give an overall perspective or argument of the work.
2. It should give a critical evaluation of the work. In critical evaluation various aspects are included like (a) what strikes a reviewer as something different about this particular piece of work (b) the ways in which it adds to your understanding of the topic or to the already existing information on the topic (c) whether it puts forward a new insight or counters the existing understanding on the topic, and (d) whether the arguments made in it are rational and valid.
3. A review should also make suggestions about why others should read a specific book and explain how it would benefit them.

### A Review of a Movie

It is important to be critical when writing a review of a movie. Use appropriate adjectives as they will help in making the review more interesting. Below is a collection of key vocabulary that is useful for writing a movie review.

#### Introduction

Facts and background information concerning the film, such as

- the title
- the name of the artists
- the name of the director and the type of movie
- the setting or place where the story in the film happens

#### Main body

- At least two paragraphs should be included in the main body. It should include:  
1st – describing the main features of the plot ( or summary of the story of the film )  
2nd – general comments and opinions on the acting; the music; the photography; the colour; the setting; the costumes and special effects.

#### Conclusion

- Your recommendation and its rationale.

Rating:

Usually coloured stars are used to indicate a recommendation of a movie. A star can be coloured fully or half. The more coloured the stars, higher the recommendation to watch it.



Structure of a review

Good reviews are generally based on the following structure:

- The subject of the review is clearly identified, with all the essential information
  - What is it about?
  - Who is involved?
  - Where did it all happen?
  - When did it happen? And so on

This is done in the introduction or often in the first few lines of the review, or both.

- A detailed description and analysis, including the reviewer's opinions. A review of a book or film should summaries the plot, but should not reveal the ending.
- Finally there is a conclusion in which the reviewer makes either a judgement or a recommendation.

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## 15.4 THE ART OF SUMMARY WRITING

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Summarising or writing a summary is a very important component of a review as also of academic writing or even writing at the workplace. A summary is a short retelling of a written passage or any other material; and it contains the most important ideas of the original material. One of the most important aspects of a summary is that it has to be written in your own words or paraphrased and not a copy of the author's words.

Thus, a good summary (a) identifies the writer of the original piece, (b) puts forward the writer's key ideas, (c) presents the information in a neutral way, and (d) is not judgmental in tone while writing it.

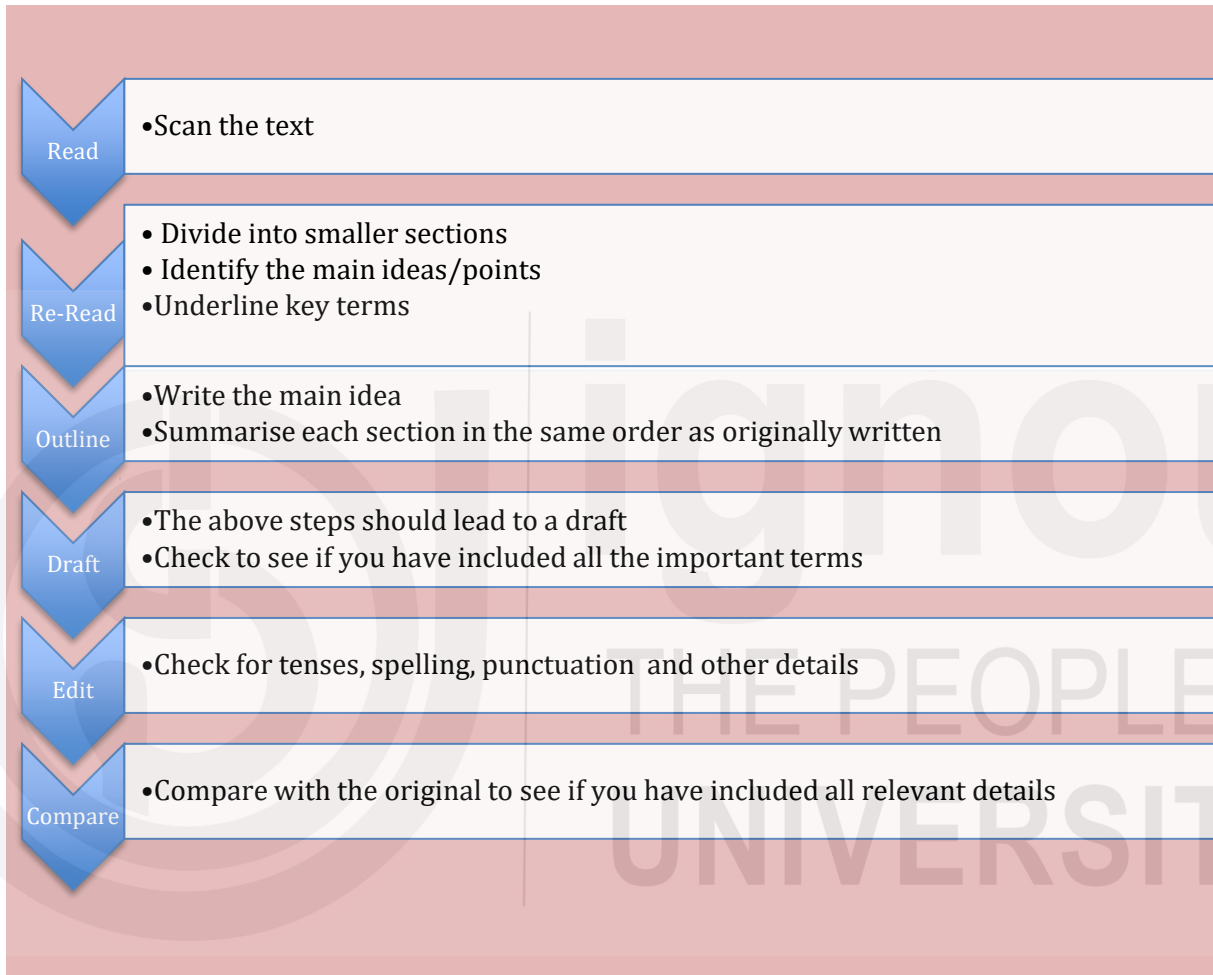
### How to write a good summary

1. **Read the text:** When you read it for the first time, just scan it. Find out the information that you can deduce from the title, introduction, conclusion, and the headings. What do these tell you about the work? Keep highlighting the main points as you read.
2. **Divide and identify:** After a quick scan, divide whole text into smaller parts. Note down the headings and subheadings.
3. **Read it for the second time:** This time, make notes of the main points in your own words. Use examples in your critique only selectively. Use only key words from the primary text. Mark the phrases that you would like to use. Understand the topic sentences.
4. **Make a list or outline:** This step takes place when you are reading for the second time. Make an outline or a list of the main ideas.
5. **Writing a summary:** Using the list or the outline, write a summary in your own words. Use the present tense to write a summary. Start with the main idea followed by other important ideas. Remember you don't have to write all the points. Never put your own ideas, or opinions

in the summary at this point. Always follow the same order in which the original piece is written. The order refers to the way in which information has been organised.

6. **Edit:** Once you have written a summary, read it to correct any mistakes that you might have made.
7. **Vocabulary:** Use the appropriate vocabulary while summarizing. For example, you could say, “the book claims”, “the author is of the opinion” etc.

**The infographic below summarises the process of summary writing**



### **An example of a literature review**

*Great Expectations*, written in 1861 by Charles Dickens, is one of the most famous books written in English. It has been translated into many languages. Below is a short review of the book.

*Great Expectations*, written in 1861 by Charles Dickens, is one of his most famous works. The story revolves around a young orphan, Pip, who lives with his elder sister and her husband, and who is not rich by any standards. The plot takes us on the journey of Pip, who knows that he will become a blacksmith like his brother-in-law when he grows up. He knows that his life will be an ordinary one. The only break from this simple life are his visits to the house of Miss Haversham, a mean old rich woman, and his meetings with a young girl Estella, whom he falls in love with. Estella doesn't return Pip's love and in fact looks down on Pip's ordinary background. However, his life changes when through an anonymous benefactor, Pip gets a chance to go to London. He enters a society which is different from his poor and humble family

background. His new training, memories of Estella and the lifestyle of the rich in London changes Pip in ways that are relevant even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dickens takes us through a range of human emotions and experiences through this gripping novel.

*Great Expectation* is a commentary on class relations, love, ambition, hopes and socio-economic issues that we can still relate to. The novel, written in first person where Pip recounts his own story, develops at a steady pace with some chapters that still have the power to evoke an emotional response in the reader. It is a book that one must read and perhaps re-read.

### Check your progress 3

**Exercise 3:** Read an article on pollution in Delhi. Fill the frame in “Identify and Write” with the correct details. Use the frame to write a summary in 100 words of the article in the space provided

## It's so sick: 89 per cent people in Delhi feel discomfort due to air pollution

India Today Web Desk  
New Delhi  
November 13, 2018

*The top four causes of the deteriorating air quality were identified to be motor vehicles, industrial units, tree cutting and construction activities.*

About 89 per cent people in Delhi feel sickness or discomfort due to the bad air quality and most of the people believe vehicles and felling of trees are the major causes behind the increasing pollution, according to a new study.

The study titled "Perception Study on Air Quality" by the Association for Scientific and Academic Research (ASAR) Social Impact Advisors, which works on social and environmental issues, said the awareness level was higher in the metros with the Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR) respondents showing the maximum awareness of all three terms -- Air Quality Index, Particulate Matter 2.5 and Particulate Matter 10.

### THE STUDY

Close to 5,000 people were interviewed across different demographics in 17 cities for the study.

About 89 per cent people in Delhi felt sickness or discomfort due to the bad air quality and most of them believed that motor vehicles and felling of trees were the major causes behind pollution, the study said.

The top four causes of the deteriorating air quality were identified to be motor vehicles (74 per cent), industrial units (58 per cent), tree cutting (56.9 per cent) and construction activities (48.2 per cent).

The study covers cities with highly-polluted air -- Delhi-NCR, Kolkata, Patna, Lucknow, Varanasi, Amritsar, Singrauli, Dhanbad, Raipur, Korba, Chandrapur, Angul, Nagpur and cities becoming rapidly polluted -- Bengaluru, Pune, Mumbai and Chennai.

The top two sources of AQI information for those who were aware and who understood AQI were newspapers and mobile apps, the study said.

A majority of the respondents (33.4 per cent) said they accessed air quality information "sometimes" and 12 per cent said "never".

The survey also showed that the age group which "always" sought AQ information was 18-25 years.

People who feel the air quality has become "much worse" belong to Angul, Delhi-NCR, Lucknow and Patna. The people of Chennai, Raipur, Mumbai, Korba and Pune feel it has become a "little worse", according to the study.

The respondents also believe that the top three environmental issues that affect personal health are air pollution (maximum at 46.4 per cent), drinking polluted water (19.5 per cent) and global warming and climate change (12.2 per cent).

Ashutosh Dikshit, CEO of Urja, the apex body of Delhi's residential welfare associations (RWAs), said, "This exhaustive survey reaffirms the fact that people are aware of air pollution. However, looking at the violations on Diwali night in most parts of north India, I feel that people do not fully believe in the stated causes of air pollution and its proportionate impact. They also do not correlate air pollution as a significant contributor to their existing or future health condition. There is a desperate need for a national-level campaign, aimed at addressing belief systems and changing behaviour."

Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/delhi-air-quality-pollution-major-causes-tree-felling-vehicles-1387891-2018-11-13>

## 1. Identify and Write

Focus of the article: \_\_\_\_\_

Source of the article: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The agency (agencies) whose data has been used:

Agency Name: : \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the study: \_\_\_\_\_

Main point of the article: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of people interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Causes of pollution: \_\_\_\_\_

Types of cities covered: \_\_\_\_\_



Sources of information about air pollution for the people:

Is air quality equally bad everywhere or are there differences?

Three issues that affect personal health: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the need of the hour, and why? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Write the Summary of the passage in no more than 100 words. Use the information given above.

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## 15.5 PARAPHRASING

In the previous section, you learnt about summarizing. To summarise means to express only the most important points made by someone else. Paraphrasing is an important technique of summary writing. Paraphrasing is to express the ideas of someone else in your own words. A good paraphrase is one that contains different vocabulary and sentence structure from the original one but still conveys the main ideas of the original author. While paraphrasing, it is important not to directly copy and paste the words used by someone else. The techniques of summarising and paraphrasing are very important in the art of writing a review or an essay.

Use synonyms or similar words	Make sure that the synonym that you choose don't have a very different meaning from the original. For example, "venues" can be used as a synonym for "sites" but it should be able to fit with the meaning of the original sentence.
Change the voice {In active voice the subject does the action but in passive voice the subject does not do the action.}	Change from active to passive: A lot of people in Delhi are falling ill because of bad air pollution (Active) → Bad air pollution is the cause of illness for many people living in Delhi (passive).  Or change from passive to active
Substitute definitions	The company has a policy of annual increments for its employees. → The company gives a raise to its workforce every year.

Combine different sentences	Use conjunctions like <b>for, because, and, nor, but, or, yet, so</b> to combine sentences.
Use components like time, dates, numbers etc creatively	24 hours can be expressed as ‘a day’ or ‘a whole day’ two weeks = 14 days = a fortnight
Exchange the verbs and nouns	Convert the nouns to verbs or verbs to nouns  For example, if the original sentence is: “The students started their research for the survey of air pollution in Delhi few days ago”.  Paraphrase: The students researched for the survey of air pollution in Delhi recently.

#### Check your progress 4

1. Paraphrase the following sentences

1. One of the biggest worries of the people today is Internet security.  
Today, internet security is one of the biggest worries of people.
2. Although it was raining, Lata wanted to walk.  
.....
3. After he finished shopping, Jai took a nap.  
.....
4. The school that is across the street is 25 years old.  
.....
5. Honesty is vital in any relationship, even if it is a difficult situation.  
.....
6. Usually people drive their car faster in cities than in villages or rural areas.  
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## 15.6 GRAMMAR

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Three main tenses are used while writing a review based on the nature of writing and text.

Tense	Use	How to form
Present Tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For stating the main points of a study or material</li> <li>• Summing up the opinion of the writer or producer of the material</li> <li>• Giving an overview of the topic or material (food, genre etc) being covered.</li> <li>• If you’re sharing your own views about a previous research/work</li> </ul>	Vikas Dalal, the producer, <i>demonstrates</i> his ability to tell a complex story in a simple way in the movie.

Past Tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting findings of past research</li> <li>• Reporting findings of past work</li> </ul>	<p>Dr Singh (1980) <i>reported</i> that...</p> <p>In most cases add 'ed' to the verb (report → reported)</p>
Present Perfect Tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When expressing general opinion about past work/ research</li> <li>• To express that research is fairly recent.</li> </ul>	<p>Several scientists <i>have observed</i>...</p> <p><i>To have/has + past participle of the main verb (Neeta has studied... → has + studied)</i></p>

Check your progress 4

1. Convert the sentence to the tense indicated.

1. I saw the book (Past Tense to Present Perfect Tense)  
I have seen the book.

2. Have you seen the rain? (Present Perfect Tense to Present Tense)

.....

3. She proved the theory wrong. (Past Tense to Present Perfect Tense)

.....

4. I have done it. (Present Perfect Tense to Present Tense)

.....

5. The movie showed racial discrimination. (Past Tense to Present Perfect Tense)

.....

.....

6. This order leads to a lot of misunderstanding. (Present Tense to Past Tense)

.....

2. This is an extract from a review. Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verbs in the brackets.

Following the realist tradition, Narayan's novels -----(tell/tells) apparently simple tales of simple folk trying to live out their ordinary lives in a changing world where they----- (struggle/struggles) to accommodate tradition with modernity, often with tragic – comic consequences. Rooted in the everyday life of Indians, his works evoke traditional Indian folklore and Hindu tradition whenever necessary. This is what probably gives his writing a certain unique flavour, as if he were writing in his native tongue. Autobiographical content also forms a significant part of some of his novels. For instance, the events surrounding the death of his wife from typhoid and his coping with his grief formed the basis of his novel *The English*

*Teacher*. At the same time, there is a certain “cosmopolitan vision” in his writing where although immersed in the local, he is able to observe his characters and their concerns dispassionately almost like an outsider, often giving an ironic twist to his tales as in the very famous *The Guide*.

What----- (make/makes) him so popular with the masses is also his “easy-to-read” style, written in unpretentious prose laced with wit, compassion and gentle humour. (He is also a great favourite of syllabus planners at both school and college levels). However, it is this very quality of simplicity which has not found favour with some critics who ----- (has make/have made) light of his vast talents - Shashi Tharoor, for instance while ----- (praises/praising) Narayan for his meticulous recording of the ironies of human life, feels however, that Narayan’s charm masked the “banality of (his) concerns, the narrowness of his vision, the predictability of his prose, and the shallowness of (his) pool of experience.” Others have likened him to Faulkner and Chekhov.

Narayan has won numerous awards and honours for his works both nationally and internationally. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award, for *The Guide* in 1958. He ----- (honoured/was honoured) with the Padma Bhushan for distinguished service to literature in 1964. In 1980, Narayan ----- (awarded/was awarded) the AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature. He was elected an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1982. He was awarded Padma Vibhushan in 2000.

Narayan may not surprise us with great innovation or even great complexity and in that sense he certainly has not “chartered new territory in his fiction”, but he has created characters and incidents which we ----- (remember/has remembered) from our own lives and reminded us of the simple truths which we more often than not tend to forget.

*Anju Sahgal Gupta (from India Today)*

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## 15.7 VOCABULARY: SOME USEFUL PHRASES

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There are some keywords that are used while writing a review. Let’s look at some keywords that you might need to use while writing a review. The list is not restrictive and you may add to it.

### **For background:**

- The work is based on...
- The book/novel is/was written by...
- This well-written/fascinating/ or badly-written/boring book...
- The story is set in...

### **Main points of the plot:**

- The plot focuses on/ revolves around...
- The story beings/is about ...
- The plot is gripping/thrilling/ boring/dull
- The book related how...

**General opinion and comments:**

- This/ the book is well paced...
- It has a tragic/dramatic/ surprising end/middle plot...
- It is an inspiring story...
- It is rather confusing/boring...

**Useful language for recommendations**

- It is well worth reading
- I would/ wouldn't recommend it because...
- It is a highly entertaining read...
- It is a bore to read

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## 15.8 WRITING

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Now that you know about reviews, so let us try writing some.

1. Pick any one movie that you have recently seen. Using the vocabulary listed in Section 1.7, write a review of the movie in no more than 100 words.



Rating:

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2. Choose any one work of fiction. It can be a classical book or a recent one. Write a review of the book in no more than 200 to 250 words.

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## 15.9 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we started with understanding the nature and purpose of a review. A review can be written about anything – an academic work, non-academic work, music, video, a shopping mall and even a restaurant. A good review is the one that critically assesses the material. A review is a process in which a reviewer not only gives a few details about the product/material but also informs others about the value of the material by making an assessment of it.

Summarising and paraphrasing are very important components of review writing. Summarising is an art of using few words to talk about something with the aim to highlight the main details. Paraphrasing is the art of writing something in your own words rather than copying word-to-word. Both are necessary in writing a good review.

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## 15.10 ANSWER KEY

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### Warm-up

How do you decide that you want to watch a particular movie? Circle the factors that will help you decide if you want to spend your money watching this unknown movie.

- ask your friends
- look online to read reviews on it
- check trailers on YouTube
- find out about the actors
- find out the ratings in the form of stars or ★□
- write down three other steps that you might take for finding more about the movie
  - i. look at the record of the director
  - ii. ask different people to get different views
  - iii. listen to music or other things connected with it.

### Check Your Progress 1

Mark these statements true or false based on your understanding of the reading passage:

7. Criticism is always negative. FASLE
8. The purpose of a book review is to simply describe the what. FALSE
9. A constructive criticism is good type of criticism. TRUE
10. Constructive criticism helps in the process of improvement by giving well-reasoned opinions in a friendly manner. TRUE
11. A review helps a customer in deciding whether to make use of a product. TRUE
12. Evaluation means giving a judgment whether the material is good or bad. TRUE

## Check Your Progress 2

Read the short note on Review Writing in Section 1.2. Use the passage to infer or form your views on the features of good review writing. Read the various features listed below. Put them under the category of Good Review Writing or Bad Review Writing.

Features of Good Review	Features of Bad Review
<p><b>8. Review is evaluation of a book/material.</b></p> <p><b>9. Review is a commentary of a material.</b></p> <p><b>10. Review has to be well organized.</b></p> <p><b>11. Reviewer should be familiar with the material that he/she is reviewing.</b></p>	<p><b>1. Review is about expressing personal opinion on the author of the book.</b></p> <p><b>2. Review should tell every detail mentioned in the book.</b></p> <p><b>3. Review is not for public circulation</b></p>

## Check Your Progress 3

Paraphrase the following sentences

- Today, internet security is one of the biggest worries of the people
- Lata wanted to go for a walk even though it was raining.
- Jai took a nap after shopping.
- That school, across the road, is 25 years old.
- Even when there is a difficult situation in a relationship, honesty is very important.
- In rural or village areas, people drive slower than they do in the city.

## Check Your Progress 4

1: Convert the sentence to the tense indicated.

- I have seen the book.
- Did you see the rain?
- She has proven the theory wrong.
- I did it.
- The movie has shown racial discrimination.
- This order led to a lot of misunderstanding.

- 2.1 tell
2. struggle
3. makes
4. have made
5. praised
6. was honoured
7. was awarded
8. remember





**ignou**  
THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY