

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL WORK – BOOK REVIEWS

Editorial policy

Australian Social Work publishes reviews of recent books, which reflect or respond to emerging trends in social work practice and scholarship, and which are deemed by the Reviews Editor to be of interest and relevance to Australian social workers and the journal's readership. Book reviews are 600 to 800 words in length.

All book reviews are commissioned by the Reviews Editor, and unsolicited reviews should not be submitted. While the Reviews Editor considers suggestions, including those from publishers, readers and potential reviewers, decisions as to which books are reviewed and who is commissioned to undertake reviews are the responsibility of the Review Editor. Where the Reviews Editor has a conflict of interest (e.g., is an author or the book has been authored by a close colleague), the Reviews Editor will refer the matter to the Editor and will not be involved with the commissioning or processing of a review.

Selection of books

Books reviewed may be Australian or overseas authored and may include reference materials, research studies and textbooks. Books are selected on the basis of their interest to a substantial proportion of the readership, which includes social work practitioners, students, researchers, educators and policy makers from many different fields of practice. If a book is likely to be of interest only to social workers in a narrow field of practice, the book might be better reviewed by a journal that focuses on the specific practice area.

Book reviews are generally of a single book. However, a review of a book series or multiple books on a theme may be commissioned at the discretion of the Reviews Editor, in which case the length of the review may be increased. The journal may also commission reviews of other published material, such as CDs, DVDs, and reports.

Australian Social Work will prioritise books that include Australian content or have authors or editors with an Australian connection. In the case of edited books, this includes books with chapters authored by those with an Australian connection, even if the editors are from overseas. However, the Reviews Editor may commission reviews of books that are considered particularly relevant to an Australian social work audience, especially in areas where there has been little published in the Australian context.

Books selected for review should be published commercially and readily available. Conversely, self-published books, and books published by a very small publisher which have a connection to the author should generally not be reviewed. This is a quality issue, which reflects that most commercial publishers have manuscripts independently reviewed prior to publication, whereas this is not the norm for self-publishing.

Books that meet the criteria for review are usually provided by publishers. This includes books sent by publishers with a request that they be reviewed and other books identified by the Reviews Editor. However, receipt of a book from a publisher does not obligate the journal to commission or publish a review.

When assessing a book that is a revised edition, consideration is given by the Reviews Editor to the extent of changes from the previous edition, the time since previous issues were published, and whether previous editions were reviewed by the journal. This particularly applies to books that are marketed as textbooks, which might be regularly updated with relatively minor changes between editions.

Selection of reviewers

Reviews will be commissioned on the basis of knowledge or expertise to enable a critical reading of the book. Potential reviewers may include social work practitioners, students, researchers, educators and policy makers.

Reviewers should be independent of the author(s) and editor(s) of the book, that is, not from the same organisation and not known to be scholarly collaborators.

Unsolicited reviews should be rejected as not meeting the requirement of reviewer independence (e.g., where the author of a book invites someone of his/her own choosing to review it and then submits the 'finished review' for publication). Authors may contact the Reviews Editor to indicate they have published a new book that might be of interest to the journal, but all contact after that should be via the publisher, with the author having no involvement with the selection of a reviewer.

Potential reviewers may contact the Reviews Editor to indicate their interest in reviewing a particular book. If the Reviews Editor is satisfied that the reviewer is independent of the author(s), has the relevant expertise to review the book, and the Reviews Editor believes a review of this book should be commissioned, they may consider this request.

Reviewer Instructions

Process of reviews

In commissioning reviews, the reviews Editor will negotiate a timeframe with the reviewer and provide a free copy of the book, which the reviewer may keep on completion of the review. If unable to complete the review, reviewers should let the Reviews Editor know as soon as possible. In such instances, the Reviews Editor may request the book be returned, so that someone else can be commissioned to review the book.

Ideally, reviews should appear as soon as possible after the book has been published. Hence, it is very important that reviewers submit their work in the agreed timeframe. The journal retains the right not to publish a review which is received late.

Reviewers may contact the Reviews Editor if they have any questions regarding the review process or if, after reading the book, they consider that it is not suitable for review in the journal, or if they wish to discuss a perceived conflict of interest. The Reviews Editor can be contacted at asw-vic@bigpond.net.au

Completing a review

Writing book reviews is a professional service, which not only alerts readers to new or important developments in social work but might also assist them in deciding whether to read or even buy the book.

In approaching the task, you are encouraged to consider the book from the perspective of potential readers. Readers might be wondering about a number of things in approaching the question: Is it worth reading? A good review is more than just a description of contents – it is evaluative and offers the reader rich insights.

A careful read of the book should not only include the main text, but also the title and any subtitle, chapter titles, appendices, and indexes. A preface or introduction will often include useful information about the envisaged scope, purpose, and audience.

Careful planning of the review is needed, given the limited space available (600 to 800 words), and the number of things that might warrant a comment. If you have not previously completed a book review, in developing your approach to judging a book, consider comparing a range of book reviews published in professional literature and the press.

Content of reviews

There is no single formula, but all reviews cover two major aspects. First, an overview and comment on the book's aim and contents is provided, and second, an evaluation is offered of the value of the book's contribution to its particular literature. Whilst some description is necessary, the major contribution of reviewers is an assessment of the book's strengths and weaknesses in the context of its likely contribution to social work knowledge and practice. It might not be possible in 600-800 words to include all of the following points - they are listed here for consideration:

- The intended audience for the book and who (else) would find it useful;
- The main ideas and major objectives of the book and how effectively these are achieved;
- The context or impetus for this book – practice innovation, political controversy, review of research, etc;
- How does this book fit with current thinking on the subject? Does it offer new or innovative ideas?;
- A clear indication of the content. Note the key themes or topics rather than list every chapter;
- If the book is an edited collection of chapters by different authors, not every chapter need to be discussed. Reviews can focus on specific chapters that are considered particularly pertinent;
- In what way is it making a contribution to the profession, and what issues does it raise?;
- The quality of the scholarship, including writing, methods, and information presented;
- How is the book written, is it easy to follow, obtuse, condescending?;
- Constructive comments about strengths and weaknesses;
- Comments on the layout, indexing and literature are legitimate areas of interest; and
- The cost of the book in terms of value for money.

Provide specific examples rather than just offer generalisations. For example, rather than just noting the book makes “interesting observations”, discuss one of these. Similarly, if aspects of the book are considered problematic, you can identify some of these.

Reviews should be respectful and are not used as a forum for making personal attacks on the author(s). For example, it is important not to tell the author what they should have written or how you would have written this book.

Format and style

Please preface your review with details of the publication, set out as follows:

Title, Author(s)/Editor(s), Publishers, Place of Publication, Year of Publication, ISBN Number, Number of Pages, Hardback/Paperback, Indices (if appropriate) and price.

For example:

Our Voices: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Work

BINDI BENNETT, SUE GREEN, STEPHANIE GILBERT, & DAWN BESSARAB (EDS)

South Yarra, Vic, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

255 pp., ISBN 9781420256734, \$64.95 (paperback)

Reviews must be written in English, and Australian English (Macquarie Dictionary) spelling and punctuation is preferred. Please use double quotation marks, except where “a quotation is ‘within’ a quotation”. Long quotations of 40 words or more should be indented without quotation marks.

Any references should follow the guidelines presented in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) (6th ed.). In-text references should be indicated in the typescript by giving the author's name with the year of publication in parentheses, e.g. Smith (1999) or Smith and Jones (1998); or if there are more than two authors, Smith et al. (1997). The references should be listed in full alphabetically at the end of the review in the following standard form:

Bennett, B., Zubrzycki, J., & Bacon, V. (2011). What do we know? The experience of social workers working alongside Aboriginal people. *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 20-37.

Briskman, L. (2007). *Social work with Indigenous communities*. Annandale, NSW: Federation Press.

Zubrzycki, J., & Bennett, B. (2006). Aboriginal Australians. In W. H. Chui & J. Wilson (Eds.), *Social work and human services best practice*. Leichhardt, NSW: The Federation Press.

At the end of your review, include your name, position and the name of your employer.

Submission, assessment and publication of reviews

In submitting a review, you are committing not to submit the same review to another journal. *Australian Social Work* does not publish reviews that will appear in another publication.

All book reviews should be submitted as email attachments to the Reviews Editor at asw-vic@bigpond.net.au

Submitted reviews are assessed by the Reviews Editor, and any substantial amendments are discussed with the reviewer. Prior to acceptance, the review may require grammatical or stylistic changes, or changes to content. The Reviews Editor can reject a review which is not in accordance with the guidelines for reviews.

Once accepted, the Reviews Editor forwards the review to the journal's publisher, Taylor and Francis. Prior to publication, you are sent a copyright form, which you are required to complete and send it to the publisher. Reviews cannot be published if this is not received.

Reviewers are also provided with an opportunity to check the proofs. Details as to how to check these are sent to you by email. These need to be returned by the due date. If there is an issue with the proofs, you should liaise with the publisher about this.

On publication, the reviewer receives an e-copy of their review. Copies of the review are also sent to the publisher of the material, who will usually forward a copy to the author.