Reviews: Things to keep in mind

1. You do not have to be an expert on the subject of the work, but your review should be more than a mere summary of the contents. If you are having problems, please ask me for advice.

2. Include your own opinion as to the value of the work, and why you hold this opinion. If you think it was boring, say so; but offer evidence in support of your assertion.

3. Look for the author's thesis. What is the reason that the author wrote the book? Is there a clear thesis statement? Does the author state that the book was written as a corrective to previous books? (It is possible that no clear thesis can be found, but before you come to this conclusion, see me so as to make sure nothing is being overlooked. Some authors can state their thesis in such convoluted ways that it is quite difficult to find). State what the thesis is in your review.

4. Keep the thesis in mind while reading the book. Does the author support his argument to your satisfaction? If so, why? Why not? Does he present persuasive evidence to back up the thesis? Do his conclusions match the thesis? These questions should be addressed in your essay.

5. Look at the footnotes and bibliography. What sort of evidence does the author employ? Primary sources? (Those by contemporaries of the action, such as a general's memoirs of his war years, or documents and letters by people alive as the action takes place). Secondary sources? (Written by people who were not present during the time in question, such as a book by an historian about a period long in the past).

6. Pay attention to the author's style. If he writes well, say so and present examples. If he is wordy, obscure, confusing, or boring, say so and present evidence.

7. Quotations. A few short quotations should be used for evidence, as well as to present the author's thesis. Do not footnote; at the end of the quote put the page number in parentheses. For example: "There are moments in the lives of men, which, as they are seized or neglected, decide their future destiny."(p.202) Remember though, the review should only include at most a few short quotes as the exercise is to demonstrate your thought.

8. At the beginning of your review, provide a bibliographical entry for the book or article, such as: William H. Prescott. History of the Conquest of Peru. New York: A.L.Burt Company, 1905.

9. Format and style. Do not use personal pronoun "I". There are ways around its use, for example: Do not say--I found Prescott's book to be exciting and well written. Rather write something such as-Prescott's book is exciting and his prose magnificent.

10. Required: Compare the author's interpretation in the book that you have chosen to similar material in the textbook. Do the textbook and your author agree? How or how not?