

Reviews Are In

Read, Write, and
Expand Your Career

Henrietta Verma

M B M
PEAK
SERIES 



MISSION BELL MEDIA

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— About the Author —



Henrietta (“Etta”) Verma went to University College, Dublin, Ireland, earning there a Bachelor of Social Science degree. She then moved to the United States and earned a Master of Library Science degree from Queens College of the City University of New York, and later a certificate in Archives and Records Management from the same institution. While in library school, Etta became a librarian trainee at Queens Library. After graduating 16 years ago, she continued at Queens Library as an Adult Reference Librarian; then worked at

DeVry University as the Library Director; and then at *School Library Journal (SLJ)* and *Library Journal (LJ)*, starting as a contributing editor and ending up as the head of *LJ*’s review team. Etta left *LJ* in 2015 and is now Senior Editorial Communications Specialist at NISO, the National Information Standards Organization.

Etta believes that literacy is a civil right and especially enjoys free literacy activities she pursues in her spare time: running a Little Free Library at her children’s school and holding free book swaps in a local park in honor of Cynthia Hurd, the librarian who was killed in the 2015 Charleston church shooting. Etta truly enjoys seeing children excited about books and watching neighbors meet each other to swap well-loved reads. At the same time, she loves that her day job involves advancing literacy by helping those who are making changes to library and information science to work together and make their innovations more accessible.

Nonfiction writing and reading is also a big passion for Etta, and she is currently working on a scientific biography for middle and high school students.

She also continues to review books for *SLJ*, *LJ*, and *Booklist*, and sometimes writes magazine articles related to reading and librarianship. In her free time, she mostly enjoys “doing whatever my children are into that day” but also works on learning the Irish language and hopes someday to become a literary translator.

Etta’s library leadership principles are a combination of the golden rule (“do unto others...”) and the laws of librarianship developed by one of the founders of our profession, S. R. Ranganathan. In Etta’s words, “He said it all!”

1. Books are for use.
2. Every reader his or her book.
3. Every book its reader.
4. Save the time of the reader.
5. The library is a growing organism.

Etta states that she “hopes that readers of this book will remember his generous interpretations when choosing which materials to review and how to review them, and most of all, advance literacy while having fun and growing professionally.”

— Introduction —

As a librarian, you're aware of the reviews written for your profession—in *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, *School Library Journal*, *Choice*, and so on. How do they get there? Who writes these reviews, and can you become a part of that group? Why would it be a good thing to do? And how do you write a review?

When I was the head of a reviews department for a large publication, I was often asked these questions. The short answer is that the reviews in *Library Journal*, *School Library Journal*, and *Choice* are largely written by librarians, as are some of those in magazines that are not strictly for librarians, such as *Publishers Weekly*. Each magazine has its own submission guidelines and its own mechanism by which someone can become a reviewer. Looking on the magazine's websites for guidance is easy enough, but the librarians I met at conferences and events over the years expressed that they needed more detailed writing advice—and many needed encouragement that writing could be for them.

This book aims, first, to offer that encouragement—to show you that you can and should become a leader in our field, and that one way of doing that is by writing for your professional peers and for patrons. Early chapters discuss what library leadership is and why the profession needs more leaders, why you should consider a leadership role, and how to get over imposter syndrome, all with a view to making readers aware of the barriers librarians encounter, some that we set up for ourselves, and how to overcome those obstacles. The book then considers leadership through reviewing, by examining the continued importance of professional reviews to librarians and how writing them can make you a leader among your peers and to your patrons. *Reviews Are In* also offers chapters describing how to become a reviewer and market your writing, and how to review print and e-books, audiobooks, and other multimedia.

As the audiences have very different needs, *Reviews Are In* dedicates individual chapters to the critique of fiction and nonfiction materials for children, for young adults and new adults, and for adults. Appraisal of the artwork in books is also described, and closing appendices list vocabulary for writing about illustrations and examples of adjectives that can enliven your writing.

You will come away from this book with a solid sense of yourself as a worthy contributor in your field. You will learn how to build a portfolio as a librarian writer, which can lead to other writing opportunities within and outside the profession, not to mention strengthen your résumé and make you better at your day job. Sprinkled throughout the book are interviews with librarian and other writers, and others in the publishing field—all the professionals who make up the reviewing ecosystem and make the library market a thriving place for which to write.

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On a personal note, thank you to my family, especially my parents, Anne and Eamonn Thornton, who made me a reader, and my siblings Samantha Long, Denise Donoghue, and Len Thornton, whose encouragement is unwavering. My children Priya and Henry provided much of the inspiration for the reviews I wrote here, as their reading lives, as well as being a privilege to be a part of, have made me a better judge of what makes an outstanding book. Being a parent doesn't make the work of writing very easy, though, and I thank my husband, Arvind, for shouldering the load while I wrote *Reviews Are In*. My best friend, Heather Cortes, helped me get my first professional job in the United States; she set me on this path and is there for me through thick and thin. Finally, my gratitude always to my late, beautiful son Cian Sam. Hemingway was right: "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places." Cian's gentle sojourn with us made me who I am.