

How to Evaluate a History Book © Dana Lombardy - LombardyStudios.com

A well-constructed book can be a treasure in your library. Here are 10 steps to help determine if a book you see in a store is worth buying.

START AT THE BACK COVER AND WORK FORWARD

You should encounter most or all of the following sections of a book starting from the back.

- **BACK COVER:** *Hype or helpful?*

This promotional text can be annoyingly useless. On the other hand, a well-presented back cover blurb can reveal a book's value by telling you what's inside and why the book is important.

- **INDEX:** *Does it have multiple entries and key topics under important headings?*

A good index is essential to quickly finding specific entries without tediously searching through pages and chapters.

- **BIBLIOGRAPHY:** *Did the author use primary sources such as original documents in archives or unpublished works?*

Primary sources confer scholarly credibility to a work. Secondary sources can be useful, but secondary books and documents use or discuss information originally presented elsewhere.

- **FOOTNOTES/END NOTES:** *Are citations from primary or secondary sources?*

Beware the notation "ibid" — this means "in the same source" so if you see this footnote or endnote repeated often, it means the author is using the same source over and over.

- **APPENDICES (singular APPENDIX):** *Are there Orders-of-Battle (OOBs) or other important data?*

Appendices can contain significant supporting material that might not fit into a specific chapter's narrative.

- **CONCLUSION:** *What does the author think?*

You don't have to agree with the author, but did they present an interesting argument or tackle an intriguing topic?

- **MAPS:** *Are there any? Are they detailed? Do they agree with the text?*

A lack of maps can make the author's text nearly impossible to follow. Well-made maps can be expensive to produce but are indispensable for readers.

- **ILLUSTRATIONS:** *Appropriate and really valuable?*

Finding or creating relevant photos and other images is time-consuming and expensive. They can add tremendous value to a book.

- **INTRODUCTION (FOREWORD):** *What is the purpose of the book or its unique value?*

The publisher and/or author should explain why they published the book and what they hope to achieve with it besides making money.

- **TABLE OF CONTENTS:** *Well organized, or just "...well"?*

Chapter 1, Chapter 2, etc., is useless compared to Strategic Plan, Approach to Battle, What Each Side Saw, 2 Key Turning Points, etc.