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Campbell's Book Rating System

Sections Below: [Credibility](#) | [Research Value](#) | [Cultural Interest](#) | [Visual Information](#) | [Style](#) | [Silliness](#) | [Wow Factor](#) | [Bargain](#)

The rating system is designed to help intelligent readers decide whether to purchase a book. No simple "Buy/Don't Buy" recommendation is offered, because readers can have many different goals. Instead, evaluations are divided into categories, each of which follows its own rules, as discussed below.

All individual ratings are my own and are subject to debate. Other people may have different opinions.

-- Glenn Campbell

Credibility

This is a rating of the intellectual discipline displayed by the author, both in the book itself and in later responses to criticism. Intellectual discipline is demonstrated by the quality of supporting evidence the author provides for his claims, the connectedness of his logic and the level of emotional neutrality he exhibits. An author with low credibility makes a lot of fantastic claims without providing any significant evidence to back them up. He seems to have an emotional bias

and doesn't give a fair hearing to contradictory evidence. An author with high credibility makes modest claims and thoroughly documents them.

Credibility rates the author and his written work, not the ultimate veracity of his claims. An author can have low credibility yet his claims turn out to be true, and vice versa. Low credibility means only that the author has presented a weak argument. (I offer no rating for "truth.")

Factored into the credibility rating is the criticism the book received after its publication and the quality of the author's response to it.

Research Value

This is a rating of how well this book forms a basis for future research on the topic in question. Footnotes and references are an important factor. For a high rating, the author must give adequate citations for any articles and books that have been used as sources. It is not sufficient for the author to say that a certain event occurred; he must tell us how he knows it so we can examine the source material ourselves.

A book can have low credibility and still have high research value if the author provides a lot of leads to research materials. He might wildly misinterpret the original data, but at least he provides us with it.

Cultural Interest

This is a rating of how well the book describes or reflects a certain historical era, belief system or social subculture. A document with low credibility and low research value can have a high cultural value if teaches us about the believers and their society.

Visual Information

This is the value of the photographs, drawings and diagrams in the book. This rating is based on the information conveyed through visual means. It does not rate the artistic value of the images (which is covered in **Style**), only the information content.

Photographs, maps, drawings and graphs are considered visual information. If the book contains any of these, they are rated according to quantity and usefulness. If a book contains nothing but words, then visual information is rated as 0.

Style

A rating of the visual or literary attractiveness of the work, apart from the information conveyed. Artwork and layout are evaluated here, as is the writing style of the author. (Unless a footnote indicates otherwise, this rating is for visual style, not literary.)

Rating levels are...

1. sloppy - A messy, poorly designed work
2. awkward - Style detracts from the content
3. functional - Plain presentation that gets the job done.
4. stylish - attractive display
5. stunning - exceptional display

A book with "high style" is pleasing to the eye or compelling to read. Our preference is for "style" that complements and enhances the information content of the book. For example, in an encyclopedia with "high style," Information is

conveniently laid out (regardless of its veracity) and is easily accessible.

Silliness

Silliness is the level of absurdity, irony or unintentional humor I found in this book. When I rate a book as "very silly," it means I see it as frivolous, ridiculous, outrageous or pompous.

But that's not always bad! Silly books can be highly entertaining -- if you are in the right mood -- and they often make interesting gifts. Silly books can also have high cultural interest, reflecting a social movement or belief system. Beware, however, of books with high silliness and a low **Wow Factor** (both silly and boring), because these aren't any fun.

Silliness is usually inversely related to the author's self-awareness and sense of humor. If he takes himself too seriously and makes a lot of dire warnings based on thin evidence, his book strikes me as silly. Paranoia, hysteria and a reliance wholly on psychic information increase the silliness level. (Anyone can write a book on anything based on psychic information, and there is nothing we can do to evaluate it.) In a silly work, the author jumps to conclusions and ignores the obvious alternatives. Silliness decreases when an author shows more discipline and sticks to the facts.

Silliness is a rating of the author's style, not the subject matter. The subject matter of the book may seem absurd -- claiming, for example, that the earth is flat -- but if the author approaches the topic in a disciplined manner, the book itself may not be silly. Likewise, a book on a reasonable mainstream topic -- like the dangers of preservatives in foods -- can get silly if the tone seems inappropriately ominous.

Silliness is usually inversely related to **credibility**, but not always. A book can have low credibility and only moderate silliness if there isn't anything funny about it. (For example: a book promoting Nazi ideology.)

Wow Factor

The "Wow Factor" is how surprising I found the book when I first reviewed it. The rating levels are...

0. **Dead** - Worse than boring. There is nothing here of interest to me.
1. **Boring** - On the whole, little of interest.
2. **Routine** - May contain some good information, but retreads the same ground as other books. It wouldn't have mattered if this book were never published.
3. **Interesting** - No big surprises, but enough here to hold my interest.
4. **Surprising** - The book includes some unexpected information or teaches me something significant I hadn't expected to learn.
5. **Wow!** - This book made me sit up and say "Wow!" It something I think about long after I have finished reading. This information seems to shake our conventional view of the world and certainly deserves more attention.

Bargain

This is an overall rating of whether the book is worth the price, assuming you are interested in the topic. This is the only rating in which we consider that cost of the book and compare it to other books on the same topic. The number of pages and amount of useful information are considered. If you get a lot of data for a low price, the bargain level increases.

Low cost paperback editions usually get a higher bargain rating than the hardcover version of the same book. (If both editions are available for the same book, we evaluate only the paperback version.) A hardcover book for \$25 may get a low bargain rating, but if a paperback version later comes out for \$7, I may revise the bargain rating upward. (Paperback versions of new books usually come out about a year after the hardcover version. Sometimes it is worth waiting a few months to save \$8 or more.)

Implied in the bargain rating is my own conception of the value of money: \$10 or less is a reasonable price to pay for a book; \$20 or more is usually too much, unless the book is exceptional or contains some specialized information not found elsewhere. In my experience, a book's price bears little relation to its value. Some of the best books are available for less than \$10, while many books over \$20 are junk. The bargain rating provides an overall summary of my advice.

If you are interested only in information content, a bargain rating below 3 is essentially a "Don't Buy" recommendation. However, there could other reasons for buying a book, like cultural or entertainment value, which are not included in the bargain rating.

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