

The Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited. A good annotated bibliography: encourages you to think critically about the content of the works you are using, their place within a field of study, and their relation to your own research and ideas, proves you have read and understand your sources, orients your study and topic in a continuing professional conversation, and provides a way for others to decide whether the source will be helpful to their research if they read it.

Elements of Annotation

1. Bibliography according to the appropriate citation style (MLA, APA, CBE).
2. Explanation of main points and/or purpose of the work, basically its thesis, which shows among other things that you have read and thoroughly understand the source.
3. Verification or critique of the authority or qualifications of the author.
4. Comments on the worth, effectiveness, and usefulness of the work in terms of both the topic being researched and/or your own research project.
5. The point of view or perspective from which the work was written. For instance, you may note if the author seemed to have particular biases or was trying to reach a particular audience.
6. Relevant links to other work done in the area, like related sources, possibly including a comparison with some of those already on your list.

The first 4 elements above are usually a necessary part of the annotated bibliography. Points 5 and 6 may involve a little more analysis of the source, but you may include them in other kinds of annotations besides evaluative ones.

The General Process

Creating an annotated bibliography calls for the application of a variety of intellectual skills: concise exposition, succinct analysis, and informed library research.

First, locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and documents that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic. Briefly examine and review the actual items. Then choose those works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.

Cite the book, article, or document using the appropriate style.

Write a concise annotation that summarizes the central theme and scope of the book or article. Include one or more sentences that (a) evaluate the authority or background of the author, (b) comment on the intended audience, (c) compare or contrast this work with another you have cited, or (d) explain how this work illuminates

The Detailed Process: Areas to Consider

Introduction

You can begin evaluating a physical information source (a book or an article for instance) even before you have the physical item in hand. Appraise a source by first examining the bibliographic citation. The bibliographic citation is the written description of a book, journal article, essay, or some other published material that appears in a catalog or index. Bibliographic citations characteristically have three main components: author, title, and publication information. These components can help you determine the usefulness of this source for your paper. (In the same way, you can appraise a Web site by examining the home page carefully.)

Author

1. What are the author's credentials--institutional affiliation (where he or she works), educational background, past writings, or experience? Is the book or article written on a topic in the author's area of expertise?
2. Is the author associated with a reputable institution or organization? What are the basic values or goals of the organization or institution?

Publication Date

Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Topic areas of continuing and rapid development, such as the sciences, demand more current information. On the other hand, topics in the

humanities often require material that was written many years ago. At the other extreme, some news sources on the Web now note the hour and minute that articles are posted on their site.

Publisher

If the source is published by a university press, it is likely to be scholarly. Although the fact that the publisher is reputable does not necessarily guarantee quality, it does show that the publisher may have high regard for the source being published.

Journal Title

Is this a scholarly or a popular journal? This distinction is important because it indicates different levels of complexity in conveying ideas.

Intended Audience

What type of audience is the author addressing? Is the publication aimed at a specialized or a general audience? Is this source too elementary, too technical, too advanced, or just right for your needs?

Objective Reasoning

1. Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda? It is not always easy to separate fact from opinion. Facts can usually be verified; opinions, though they may be based on factual information, evolve from the interpretation of facts. Skilled writers can make you think their interpretations are facts.

2. Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence? Assumptions should be reasonable. Note errors or omissions.

3. Are the ideas and arguments advanced more or less in line with other works you have read on the same topic? The more radically an author departs from the views of others in the same field, the more carefully and critically you should scrutinize his or her ideas.

4. Is the author's point of view objective and impartial? Is the language free of emotion-arousing words and bias?

Coverage

1. Does the work update other sources, substantiate other materials you have read, or add new information? Does it extensively or marginally cover your topic? You should explore enough sources to obtain a variety of viewpoints.

2. Is the material primary or secondary in nature? Primary sources are the raw material of the research process. Secondary sources are based on primary sources. Choose both primary and secondary sources when you have the opportunity.

Types of Annotations

Summary Annotations:

Summarizing annotations in general have a couple of defining features:

- They sum up the content of the source, as a book report might.
- They give an overview of the arguments and proofs/evidence addressed in the work and note the resulting conclusion.
- They do not judge the work they are discussing. Leave that to the critical/evaluative annotations.

There are two kinds of summarizing annotations, informative and indicative.

Informative annotations sometimes read like straight summaries of the source material, but they often spend a little more time summarizing relevant information about the author or the work itself.

Indicative annotation is the second type of summary annotation, but it does not attempt to include actual information from the argument itself. Instead, it gives general information about what kinds of questions or issues are addressed by the work. This sometimes includes the use of chapter titles.

Critical/Evaluative Annotations:

Evaluative annotations don't just summarize. In addition to tackling the points addressed in summary annotations, evaluative annotations:

- evaluate the source or author critically (biases, lack of evidence, objective, etc.).

- show how the work may or may not be useful for a particular field of study or audience.
- explain how researching this material assisted your own project.

Combination:

An annotated bibliography may combine elements of all the types. In fact, most of them fall into this category: a little summarizing and describing, a little evaluation.

Example Bibliography*(Note this should be double spaced)*

Doll, Susan and Greg Faller. "Blade Runner and Genre: Film Noir and Science Fiction." Literature Film Quarterly 14.2 (1986): 89-100. Doll and Faller assert that Ridley Scott's film, Blade Runner, exhibits elements of two distinct pulp genres, film noir and science fiction. The genre cross-pollination is a reflection of Philip K. Dick's novel, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? upon which the movie is based. After a useful discussion of genre, the authors go on to effectively discuss defining characteristics of both noir and sci-fi, despite the difficulties of such a project. Through the course of accessible discussion and useful examples from the film, the complexities involved in the combination of genres are revealed. In addition, the article also examines the ways that noir and sci-fi in fact complement each other, noir providing a distinct style and sci-fi a distinct narrative direction. Both genres are also concerned with many of the same issues, especially social constructs, ethics, and the state of being human. *(Combination Annotation)*

Griffin, C. Williams, ed. Teaching Writing in All Disciplines. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982. Ten essays on writing-across-the-curriculum programs, teaching writing in disciplines other than English, and teaching techniques for using writing as learning. Essays include Toby Fulwiler, "Writing: An Act of Cognition"; Barbara King, "Using Writing in the Mathematics Class: Theory and Practice"; Dean Drenk, "Teaching Finance Through Writing"; Elaine P. Mairnon, "Writing Across the Curriculum: Past, Present, and Future."*(Indicative Annotation)*

Gurko, Leo. Ernest Hemingway and the Pursuit of Heroism. New York: Crowell, 1968. This book is part of a series called "Twentieth Century American Writers": a Brief Introduction to the Man and his Work. After fifty pages of straight biography, Gurko discussed Hemingway's writing, novel by novel. There's an index and a short bibliography, but no notes. The biographical part is clear and easy to read, but it sounds too much like a summary. *(Evaluative Annotation)*

London, Herbert. "Five Myths of the Television Age." Television Quarterly 10.1(1982): 81-89. Herbert London, the Dean of Journalism at New York University and author of several books and articles, explains how television contradicts five commonly believed ideas. He uses specific examples of events seen on television, such as the assassination of John Kennedy, to illustrate his points. His examples have been selected to contradict such truisms as: "seeing is believing"; "a picture is worth a thousand words"; and "satisfaction is its own reward." London uses logical arguments to support his ideas, which are his personal opinion. He doesn't refer to any previous works on the topic. London's style and vocabulary would make the article of interest to any reader. *(Informative Annotation)*