

Writing an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a **list of sources** of information about your research topic, with annotations. Sources can be books, magazines, articles, journal articles, or even movies... All kinds of things.

Why would you want to create an annotated bibliography? When you start your research you'll be slogging through a lot of sources of information and you won't always remember the purpose of each one. The annotation helps you remember what the heck the source was about and whether it was useful. It helps you to weed out some of the sources that appeared promising at first, but are irrelevant to your research. Writing an annotated bibliography is kind of like dating your sources. They looked good on the first date, but you'll need to go on several dates to really see what's great about them, and what's, well, not so great.

As you read and reread your sources, prepare to answer specific questions. Create an entry for each source in your annotated bibliography. Here are the five things to include in your annotated bibliography for each source.

First, the **citation** of the source. A citation is everything you need to know about the source in order to find it again. There are different styles of citations for different disciplines; such as APA, MLA, and Chicago. Use the one for your field of study, or the one most appropriate for your assignment, and use it consistently throughout the annotated bibliography.

Steps two through five are annotations, which should include a brief summary of the main ideas of the source in your words.

By brief, I mean two to three sentences, covering some of the following:

- what is the purpose of the source?
- what are some of the methods the authors of the source used to make conclusions?
- what are the conclusions or main findings of the source?

Next, identify what **type of source** you've found. One way to answer this is to decide what audience the source is for.

- Is it for a popular audience or a scholarly audience? How can you tell? If you're not sure, there are plenty of people to ask. Your professor, or a librarian are two good places to go.
- If it's not scholarly or for the general public, maybe it's written for people in a particular profession. Maybe only teachers read this source to keep up with new theories or best practices based on scholarly research.

Answers to these questions will help you think about the balance of the sources you've found for your assignment. Maybe after you're finished your annotated bibliography you've realized that you have a lot of popular perspectives, but not a lot of scholarly.

Next, question the **relevance** of the source to your research. What are some of the positive characteristics of the source. What makes you think it's a good fit for your research project?

- Does it provide a good background for your research question?
- Does it explain key terms or specific procedures/methodologies that are relevant to your research?
- Does it affirm your position or understanding of your research topic?
- Does it offer a counter argument opposing position?

Finally, consider the **inadequacy** of the source. This is where you describe where your source falls short. Every source has its flaws.

- What information doesn't your source give you?
- Does it fail to address your own thinking on your topic?
- Does it address only a small or semi-related part of your topic?
- Did it forget your birthday?

We write annotated bibliographies because they help us organize and think critically about the information that we find. As you complete your assignments you'll be able to use that information more effectively

That's it! You're an official annotated bibliographer. Congratulations!