

Writing an Annotated Bibliography

What is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is an alphabetical list of research sources containing citations to books, journal articles, and other sources. Each citation includes a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph - the annotation. An annotation should be between 100 to 200 words. The purpose of the annotations is to provide the reader with a summary and an evaluation of the source.

There are different kinds of annotations:

- **Summary/Informative annotations** sum up the content of the source and give an overview of the arguments, evidence addressed in the work, and a conclusion.
- **Indicative annotations** give general information about what kinds of questions or issues are addressed in the source.
- **Evaluative or critical annotations** provide a summary of the source as well as assess the strengths and weaknesses of the source or the usefulness of the source.
- **Combination annotations** combine elements of all the types: summary, description, and evaluation.

Your assignments will usually make it clear which citation format you need to use, but they may not always specify which type of annotation to employ. In that case, check with your instructors to see what they want or use clue words from your assignments to help you decide.

What to include in an annotation of an academic source

An annotation of an academic source should briefly restate the main argument (thesis), the methods of investigation, and main conclusions of the source. It should also describe the author's point of view, clarity of expression, and authority. Include one or more sentences that:

1. Identify the main points and purpose of the work.
2. Note the qualifications of the author. What are the author's credentials (institutional affiliation, educational background, past writings, or experience)? Is the book/article written on a topic in the author's area of expertise?
3. Comment on the value and usefulness of the work in terms of the topic that is being researched and your own research project. Is the source current or historical?
4. Describe the writing style. Is the publication organized logically? Are the main points clearly presented? Do you find the text easy to read? Is the author's argument repetitive?
5. State the point of view or perspective from which the work was written. Is the information based on fact, opinion, or propaganda? Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence?
6. Compare or contrast this work with another you have cited.

The first four elements above are usually a necessary part of the annotation. Points 5 and 6 involve a little more analysis of the source and you may want to include them in your annotation depending on the instructions you receive from your instructors.

Styles of annotations

If your assignments do not indicate which citation format you need to use, decide which kind of citation format is appropriate to the paper and its sources (see APA and MLA below). Or you may want to check with your instructors, since they may have a different style they want you to follow.

- APA style of documentation is used for disciplines in natural and social sciences, such as psychology, nursing, sociology, and social work. It is also used in economics, business, and criminology.
- MLA style of documentation is generally used for disciplines in the humanities, such as English, languages, film, and cultural studies or other theoretical studies.

Example of an annotated bibliography entry according to APA format

(<http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/annotatedbibliog.php>)

Chrisholm, P. (1996, March 11). The ADD dilemma. *Maclean's*, 109, 42-44.

This magazine article looks at the use of Ritalin in Canada. Specifically, it covers the drug's side effects, why there is so much debate surrounding its use and how teachers have come to rely on it to control problem students. The article is based on information taken from interviews, statistics and studies that were conducted. Overall, it is well written and well researched.

Example an annotated bibliography entry according to MLA format

(<http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/annotatedbibliog.php>)

Chrisholm, Patricia. "The ADD dilemma." Maclean's 11 Mar. 1996: 42-44. This magazine article looks at the use of Ritalin in Canada. Specifically it covers the drug's side effects, why there is so much debate surrounding its use and how teachers have come to rely on it to control problem students. The article is based on information taken from interviews, statistics and studies that were conducted. Overall, it is well written and well researched.

Works used in preparation of this handout

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Gibaldi, Joseph, ed. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6th ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

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