

Bibliographic Skills Workshop: Annotated Bibliography

The Importance of Organization

We all understand that an abundance of information can be overwhelming, especially in a research project. But you can be the master of the information, if you **organize**.

Staying organized will help with the following:

- Relating ideas in separate articles to each other and to your research question
- Knowing where there are holes in your research or when you have enough or too much information in one thematic area
- Knowing when you are done with your research
- Picking up key themes or concepts in your resources

Why an Annotated Bibliography?

There are a number of ways to go about organizing your research – outlines, extensive note taking, or even index cards. From our own perspective, one of the more effective organization and research tools is the annotated bibliography.

An annotated bibliography offers many advantages:

- It is a way to be active while reading – synthesizing information as you uncover it and allowing you to react to a source, make connections to other research, and identify themes in your research area.
- It is a concise and standardized way to synthesize your notes, evaluate the resource and determine areas that you will need to do more research.
- It forces you, very early in the research process, to put information in your own words and evaluate information from your perspective.
- You can do a comprehensive literature scan without having to write a full-length paper or long review of each article.
- It is easy to convert an annotated bibliography to a reference page for your paper because your citations have already been written and organized by theme.
- Annotated bibliographies make the writing process easier because you can quickly pick up general themes in your research question, making it easier to construct your argument.

How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

The following section explains what an annotated bibliography is and the essential components of the annotation. We also provide you with a structured process for how to think about and write your own annotation.

What is an annotated bibliography?

A summary of the works you are using

- An annotated bibliography is a list of works you are using for your research. Each source is cited and accompanied by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph.
- Remember, you don't have to include everything in your bibliography. In order to be the most useful (and organized) you should include only sources that are important and relevant to your research process.

An evaluation of the works you are using

- An annotation is different than an abstract in that it is both descriptive and critical. An abstract, on the other hand, is only descriptive.
- An annotation doesn't simply summarize an article, it critiques the author's point of view, argument or authority.

A way of putting works you are using in context

- An annotation is a way to connect your sources to each other and to your research question.

Components of the annotated bibliography

The Citation

- The bibliographic citation is the first part of the bibliography. There are a wide variety of documentation styles (APA, MLA, Chicago Style, APSA, etc.), so check with your instructor to determine which style is required.

The Annotation

- As stated earlier, the annotation is a short (150-250 words, depending on what you are citing) descriptive and evaluative paragraph.
- There are really three goals to the annotation: summarize the argument, evaluate the argument, and connect that argument to your broader research question.

- *Summarize*

Summarizing helps you pick out the keywords or themes of the article and pinpoint the most critical arguments.

While reading think about the following:

- What is the article about? Can you pick out the keywords or themes?
- What are the critical arguments or conclusions made in the article?

- *Evaluate*

Evaluating helps you succinctly summarize the strengths and/or weaknesses of the arguments.

While reading think about the following:

- Are the arguments and conclusions convincing and well-reasoned?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the argument?

- *Connect*

Connecting is an essential part of the research process and an annotation can be particularly helpful. Understanding how the article was or was not useful to you, how it relates to other articles or your broad research question, and what additional questions it raised are all important in deciding where to go next with your research.

While reading think about the following:

- How does the article help you? How is it useful in your research? (If the article wasn't helpful you shouldn't include it in your bibliography.)
- What additional questions does the article raise?