

15.

CREATING AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Learning Objectives

- Explain what an annotated bibliography is
- Write an annotated bibliography

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

A **bibliography** is a list of sources a writer has used to research a topic. These sources can be books, web sites, journals, popular magazines, newspapers, primary source artifacts, and other sources. The list of sources typically includes information about the publication organized in a specific documentation, such as MLA.

An **annotation** is a descriptive and evaluative paragraph or two about the source. Combined, the bibliography list of citations plus the addition of the annotation for each source becomes an **annotated bibliography**.

It is easy to get confused whether you are expected to submit just the bibliography (list of sources) or an annotated bibliography (list of sources **plus** a summary and maybe an evaluation of each source). To complicate matters further, a bibliography could be a “working bibliography,” which lists sources you *might* use in your essay, or it could be the list of sources you actually used—quoted, paraphrased, and summarized. Sometimes, your professors may use other names for these items, depending on the discipline.

The important thing to look for is whether your professor is asking you to include a summary for each source. When you are asked to list your sources you included in your essay at the end of an essay or research paper, then you are creating a bibliography—a list of sources you referenced in the essay. For MLA style, the bibliography at the end of an essay or research paper is titled “Works Cited,” but other formats use other terms. If you’re supposed to include a summary and/or evaluation for each of the sources you used or are planning to use in an essay, you’re writing an annotated bibliography.

Why Write an Annotated Bibliography?

Often, your professor will want you to submit an annotated bibliography as a stand-alone assignment before you submit the research paper, to show that you are on track to write a good research essay. The annotated bibliography may also be required when you submit your final essay so that your professor or other readers can learn more about the sources you consulted to write the final paper.

The real reason to write an annotated bibliography, though, is for you: an annotated bibliography is a means of keeping track of the many, many sources you're likely to read for a research paper over a period of several weeks. Gone are the days when you can write a strong research paper by grabbing several sources, skimming them for quotes, and writing the essay the night before it's due. An annotated bibliography tells you which sources cover which points. Combined with your extensive research notes, the annotated bibliography will help you think about what you're writing, how you're using sources, and what additional information you need so that you can write a strong essay.

What Goes Into Writing an Annotated Bibliography?

For each source in an Annotated Bibliography, you will have two parts:

1. The citation of your source
2. Your annotation, which is usually a paragraph or, at most, two paragraphs that summarize and evaluate the source and that explain how you'll use it in your research paper.

The Citation

To cite a source correctly, you must always, always refer to a style guide. Disciplines use different documentation styles, and no professor expects a student to memorize all of the rules for any documentation style; rather, professors want you learn the basics of the documentation style and to look up the correct format for the sources you've found. In a science class, the documentation style will probably be CBE. In a psychology class, you will likely APA. English classes use MLA.

Many writers create a working bibliography as they begin finding sources for their research. A working bibliography is a list of sources, cited according to the prescribed documentation format. Creating a working bibliography at the start of a research project saves you time later, when you have to create an annotated bibliography or when you're creating the bibliography to attach to your essay. If a working bibliography has not been created, you will need to cite each of the sources you're using for your annotated bibliography by following a style guide. Style guides can be found online. For example, you can use Purdue OWL MLA Formatting and Style Guide. You can also use citation builders.

The Annotation

The annotation typically includes three parts:

1. **Summarize.** Consider the information in the source. What is the main point of the article? What topics are covered? What are the main arguments? What would you tell someone who asked you what this article was about?
2. **Assess/evaluate.** After summarizing the source, you should analyze the usefulness of the information. Is there any relevant background information about the author's credentials or any historical relevance? How does it compare to other sources you are considering? Is the source biased or objective? Could the source have value in your paper if the bias is acknowledged? If you've found the source in the library, it's likely to be appropriate for academic research, but not always. Peer reviewed or scholarly sources, however, are always appropriate for college-level research.
3. **Reflect.** After you've summarized and analyzed the source, you need to ask yourself how this source fits in with your research. You wouldn't be using the source if it didn't support your thesis, so simply stating information from the source will help you make your argument is not specific enough. Instead, think about which research sub-topics or sub-questions the information addresses. Has information in this source changed how you think about your topic or prompted you to revisit any of your sub-topics? Also, make connections among the different sources you're studying. For example, if two sources discuss similar examples of a problem, you may be able to present both of those examples in one of the paragraphs of your essay. Your annotation can indicate that you've made that connection.

Writing the Annotation

If you're writing an annotated bibliography for your own purposes, you determine how long each annotation should be, and you don't need to worry about writing in complete sentences or using sophisticated vocabulary. You will, however, need to write clearly enough so that you can understand it later, and you will need to be accurate in your discussion of each source. The citations, too, should be correct.

If you have to complete an annotated bibliography for a professor, the length and format of your annotations will vary, but typically, you will need to present a concise summary of the key points of the article, your evaluation, and your reflection, in approximately 150-200 words. Your sentences should be complete and grammatically correct, and your paragraph should reflect your ability to summarize and synthesize information. Be sure to check your professor's specific requirements, if any. In addition, keep the following in mind:

1. Keep the summary short but always include the source's thesis or main point.
2. In addition to a brief summary, you can include specific statements, cited with an in-text citation, that you might want to remember when you return to the source.

3. Be specific in your discussion of how you'll use the source information in your research. Don't simply state you'll use it "to support your argument." Of course you're going to use it to support your argument! Your professor wants to know how you plan to use the information: to support a sub-claim, to address a counterargument, to provide background information, etc.

Formatting

Page Formatting

Your paper should follow standard MLA style formatting. In general, this includes

- 1-inch margins on all sides
- Double-spaced text
- A legible font (e.g. Times New Roman), size 12 font
- Indenting the first line of each paragraph using the TAB key on the keyboard
- A heading on the first page of the document (Name, Date, Class, Instructor)

Page Title

Your page title (after the heading) should be: Annotated Bibliography. Remember, MLA style calls for regular font on titles, no bolding or other font decoration. After the title, press the enter key on your keyboard and begin typing your first citation & annotation.

Citation/Annotation Order

In a bibliography (annotated or not), your sources should be listed in alphabetical order based on the first important word in the citation. This will be the author's last name or, if the author is not named, the first word in the source title other than A or The.

Citation Formatting

Each citation should be double-spaced with a hanging indent.

Nussbaum, Martha. "Education for Profit, Education for Freedom," *Liberal Education*, vol. 95, no. 3, Summer 2009, pp. 6–13. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=44043290&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Annotation Formatting

Your annotation follows the citation and is formatted as a regular paragraph. Only the first line of the paragraph is indented. The paragraph is double-spaced.

Example of an Annotated Bibliography Entry

Nussbaum, Martha. "Education for Profit, Education for Freedom," *Liberal Education*, vol. 95, no. 3, Summer

2009, pp. 6–13. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=44043290&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

This article discusses two kinds of education: one that helps students become free-thinking citizens of the world and one that trains students to become complaint workers. Nussbaum argues that an education for freedom “will begin from the idea of equal respect for all human beings and equal entitlement of all to a range of central human opportunities—not just in one’s own nation, but everywhere in the world” (8). An education for profit, on the other hand, seeks to create docile citizens who don’t question thing. Nussbaum is a philosophy professor at the University of Chicago and has published several books. Moreover, this article is published in *Liberal Education*, a scholarly journal for people who teach in colleges and universities. It was published in 2009, but it doesn’t seem dated; her ideas are still relevant. I can use some of her ideas to support one of my sub-claims, which is that one reason to teach Holocaust literature is to help students develop empathy for all people.

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