



Guide to Annotated Bibliographies

What is an annotated bibliography?

A **bibliography** is a list of sources (books, journals, websites, periodicals, etc.) used for researching a topic, usually as a precursor to writing a research paper. Bibliographies are sometimes called "References" or "Works Cited" depending on the style format you are using. A bibliography usually just includes bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.).

An **annotation** is a summary and/or evaluation. Therefore, an **annotated bibliography** includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources. Depending on your project or the assignment, your annotations may do one or more of the following.

- **Summarize:** Some annotations merely summarize the source. What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say? The length of your annotations will determine how detailed your summary is.
- **Assess:** After summarizing a source, it may be helpful to evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?
- **Reflect:** Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. **You may even go as far as identifying evidence that you would include in your paper during this process.** Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

Your annotated bibliography may include some of these, all of these, or even others. **You should follow the specific guidelines from your instructor and ask questions to clarify if needed.**

Why write an annotated bibliography?

To help you learn about your topic! Writing an annotated bibliography is an excellent preparation step for writing a research paper. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you must write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information. At the professional level, annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been done in the literature and where your own research or scholarship can fit. To help you formulate a thesis: Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So, a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said

about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and you'll then be able to develop your own point of view.

What is the proper format of an annotated bibliography?

The format of an annotated bibliography can vary, so it's important to follow the specific guidelines from your instructor and ask questions for clarification if necessary.

The bibliographic information:

Generally, though, the bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in either MLA or APA format. For more help with formatting, see this [MLA handout](#). For APA, go here: [APA handout](#).

Sample Entry from an Annotated Bibliography

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Citation | { | Booker, Susan M. "Dioxin in Vietnam: Fighting a Legacy of War." <i>Environmental Health Perspectives</i> 109.3 (2001):116. ProQuest. Web. 29 Apr. 2009. |
| Annotation | { | Booker reports on the launch of a joint research program on the human and environmental health effects from spraying Agent Orange and other herbicides during the Vietnam War. The extent of Agent Orange exposure among the Vietnamese, identification of highly contaminated areas and monitoring migration of dioxin are assessed. The author asserts the government is not doing enough to help the Vietnamese people who still suffer from Agent Orange. This is written for people with little prior knowledge of this subject and is easy to understand. It was a useful starting point for writing this paper and because of its currency this is a valuable source for my research. |

The annotations: The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the purpose. If you're just writing summaries of your sources, the annotations may not be very long. However, if you are writing an extensive analysis of each source, you'll need more space. A few sentences of general summary, followed by several sentences of how you can fit the work into your larger paper or project, can serve you well when you go to draft.

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