What Is an Annotated Bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually around 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

Annotations versus Abstracts

Abstracts are the purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes. Annotations are descriptive and critical; they expose the author's point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority.

Arrangement of Entries

An annotated bibliography can be put in alphabetical order or may be broken down into different research media or genres (books, journal articles, magazine articles, Web documents). Alternatively, it may be arranged by subject matter (Irish literature, Irish history), by period (American Civil War, Reconstruction era of the United States, Spanish–American War), or by area (Egyptian mythology, Greek mythology, Norse mythology).

The Process

Creating an annotated bibliography calls for the application of a variety of intellectual skills: concise exposition, succinct analysis, and informed library research.

First, locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and documents that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic. Briefly examine and review the actual items. Then choose those works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.

Cite the book, article, or document using the appropriate style (such as MLA, APA or Chicago/Turabian).

Write a concise annotation that summarizes the central theme and scope of the book or article. Include one or more sentences that (a) evaluate the authority or background of the author, (b) comment on the intended audience, (c) compare or contrast this work with another you have cited, or (d) explain how this work illuminates your bibliography topic.

Critically Appraising the Book, Article, or Document

Consider questions such as: Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? What type of audience is the author addressing? Is the information covered based on fact, opinion, or propaganda? Is the author's point of view objective and impartial? Does the information appear to be valid and well-researched, or is it questionable and unsupported by evidence? Is the publication organized logically? Are the main points clearly presented?

Choosing the Correct Format for the Citations

Check with your instructor to find out which style is preferred for your class. Online citation guides for the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Chicago/Turabian styles are linked from the Library's Study Aids page <http://www.lacitycollege.edu/resource/library/LibraryInstruction/StudyAids.htm>. For more details, please consult one of the following official style manuals:

- Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. 6th ed. (R 808.027 Am35p6)
- MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 7th ed. (R 808.027 M72m7)
- The Chicago Manual of Style. 16th ed. (R 808.027 C432m16).
Sample Annotated Bibliography Entry for a Journal Article

The following example uses the APA format for the journal citation.


The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University, use data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men to test their hypothesis that nonfamily living by young adults alters their attitudes, values, plans, and expectations, moving them away from their belief in traditional sex roles. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males. Increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families. In contrast, an earlier study by Williams cited below shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of nonfamily living.

This example uses the MLA format for the journal citation.


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