



Annotated Bibliography

A **bibliography** is a list of sources (books, journals, Web sites, periodicals, etc.) used in a research project. Bibliographies are sometimes called “References” or “Works Cited” depending on the style format you are using. A bibliography usually just includes the 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 is the point of this book or article? What are the main arguments? 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. How credible is the source and why? Is the information reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source? How does it compare to other sources in your bibliography? *For more information on assessing the credibility of sources, see our Evaluating Sources handout.*

Reflect: Once you’ve summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape how you think about your topic?

Your annotated bibliography may include some of these, all of these, or even others. If you’re doing this for a class, you should get specific guidelines from your instructor.

Annotated Bibliography Format

The format of an annotated bibliography can vary, so if you’re doing one for a class, it’s important to ask for specific guidelines.

The bibliographic information: The bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in format used for the class (i.e., MLA Style, APA Style, Chicago, etc.).

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 of the assignment. If you’re just writing summaries of your sources, the annotations may not be very long. However, if you’re writing an extensive analysis of each source, you’ll need more space.

You can focus your annotations for your own needs. 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.

Sample Annotated Bibliography

In the sample annotation below, the writer includes three paragraphs: a summary, an evaluation of the text, and a reflection on its applicability to his/her own research, respectively.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995. Print.

Lamott's book offers honest advice on the nature of writing life, complete with its insecurities and failures. Taking a humorous approach to the realities of being a writer, the chapters in Lamott's book are wry and anecdotal and offer advice on everything from plot development to jealousy, from perfectionism to struggling with one's own internal critic. In the process, Lamott includes writing exercises designed to be both productive and fun.

Lamott has the credibility and expertise to write about the subjects of a writing life because of her success as an author. She has been inducted into the California Hall of Fame, awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and has spoken at writing conferences across the country. In her book, Lamott offers sane advice for those struggling with the anxieties of writing, but her main project seems to be offering the reader a reality check regarding writing, publishing, and struggling with one's own imperfect humanity in the process. Rather than a practical handbook to producing and/or publishing, this text is indispensable because of its honest perspective, its down-to-earth humor, and its encouraging approach.

Chapters in this text could easily be included in the curriculum for a writing class. Several of the chapters in Part 1 address the writing process and would serve to generate discussions on students' own drafting and revising process. Some of the writing exercises would also be appropriate for generating classroom writing exercises. Students should find Lamott's style both engaging and enjoyable.

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