

Annotated Bibliographies

Like any bibliography or list of Works Cited, an annotated bibliography is an alphabetical list of books, articles, films, catalogue essays, and other documents that you have used in your research. But in an annotated bibliography, every citation or reference is followed by a paragraph or several paragraphs that summarizes and/or evaluates the source in terms of your particular topic or project. This explanatory information is called the annotation. Annotated bibliographies are often assigned as part of a proposal for a research paper.

An annotated bibliography is an excellent way to familiarize yourself with what has been written on your topic. Doing research always involves some degree of skimming and scanning, but knowing that you need to write an annotation about each of your selected sources makes you select sources more carefully and read them more attentively. Research is, by its very nature, a collaborative dialogue between scholars and practitioners in a field of study. When you provide an annotated bibliography for your instructor, you are illustrating that you, too, are participating in that ongoing dialogue, that you are able to conduct appropriate research, and that you can examine various types of resources. An annotated bibliography also allows your instructor to see that you will be using diverse and relevant sources for your particular project.

The key to preparing a good annotated bibliography is to select appropriate sources for your particular research topic or question. If, for example, you are asked to write a research essay on Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* and the distortion of the female figure, you would not want your annotated bibliography to include only biographies of Picasso. You might consult one or two biographies of Picasso about this theme in his work or this period in his career, but you would also look for a range of sources: on Picasso's work and aesthetic generally, on the work of other contemporary painters and artists of the period, and on this painting in particular.

The annotations themselves can vary in length from one or two sentences to a paragraph or two. They can also include different types of information: some instructors will ask you only to summarize the main information or key arguments of each source, while others will want you to also explain why or how the source might be useful for your proposed research topic. Make sure to ask your instructor what and how much they expect to see in each annotation if the assignment sheet does not make this clear.

Here's an example from a Visual Culture assignment that outlines the specific requirements of an annotated bibliography in that class:

List at least four sources as you would a "Works Cited" list at the end of your Final Assignment. You must include at least one book, one journal article, and one web source. Give the appropriate citation according to the MLA format, and then write four or five sentences that describe the content of the source, how it may be useful to you, and whether you think this a valuable source. Is it a reliable, superficial, or demanding source? Why or why not?

EXAMPLES

The following example of an annotated bibliography entry was written for an Art History 420 class. The annotation here is a little longer than most instructors expect, so please consult your instructor regarding length and content before assuming that this is what they want.

Gablik, Suzi. *The Reenchantment of Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1991. Print.

Gablik examines the practice of art-making and the changing relationship between art and culture. She believes that art can no longer remain separate and above the concerns of the everyday, that there is a new emphasis on community and the environment rather than on individual achievement. She states that this ecological perspective does not replace the aesthetic but offers a deeper meaning for art, beyond the gallery system, that addresses issues of context or social responsibility.

While the main focus of this book is art and the role of artists, it also provides a philosophical perspective on the current emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical challenges that are facing our culture and world today. Gablik proposes that change is possible, that individuals can make a collective difference, and that awareness and action are partners in change.

The theme of holistic participation kept surfacing throughout the text, along with observations that mirrored many of the thoughts and questions that have been surfacing in my own mind of late. I especially liked the passage that talks about “deconstructing a reality so pervasive that we can’t see any other way of being without shedding the old mind conditioned by our culture.” It seems this is where I keep ending up in my research, aware of the almost overwhelming challenge of being between two belief systems, no longer able to participate comfortably in the old system and yet, not sure of how a new framework can be integrated into my life.

OTHER INFORMATION ON ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

The OWL at Purdue University has many excellent resources on writing and research, including some for Annotated Bibliographies. (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/annotated_bibliographies/index.html)

The Writing at University of Toronto site provides a useful **handout on annotated bibliographies** that contrasts good annotations with weaker ones. (<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/annotated-bibliography/>)

The Library at Concordia University has prepared this **reader-friendly page** on annotated bibliographies using either MLA or APA citation style. (<http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/annotatedbibliog.php>)

The **University of Wisconsin–Madison Writing Centre** has compiled a handout on annotated bibliographies that provides examples of various kinds of annotations, from point form to paragraphs. (<https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/annotatedbibliography/>)