

How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography

This document will address the following topics:

- What is an annotated bibliography?
- What purpose do annotated bibliographies serve?
- Annotations vs. Abstracts: telling them apart
- The process of writing annotated bibliographies
- Critically appraising books, articles, or other documents
- Choosing the correct style/format for the citations
- Sample annotated bibliography entries

What Is An Annotated Bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, chapters, and other and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 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.

What Purpose Do They Serve?

As a student, you are normally writing an annotated bibliography as an indication of the sources you intend to use for an assignment, paper or thesis. In this case, the purpose of writing an annotated bibliography is to record informative or descriptive annotation about the documents you read.

Annotations vs. 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.

The Process

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

1. 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.
2. Cite the book, article, or document using the appropriate style.
3. 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 Documents in Your Bibliography¹

¹ Guidelines for critically appraising and analyzing the sources in bibliographies come from the following source: <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill26.htm>. For information on the author's background and views, ask at the reference desk at Murphy Library for help finding appropriate biographical reference materials and book review sources.

For guidelines on critically appraising and analyzing the sources in bibliographies, see [[add a link to the document titled: "Critically Analyzing Information Sources"]]. For information on the author's background and views, ask at the reference desk at Murphy Library for help finding appropriate biographical reference materials and book review sources.

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 both the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the American Political Science Association (APSA) styles are linked from the Library's [[insert appropriate name]] page. The examples below all use APSA format.

Some Samples

Sample annotated bibliography entry for a journal article (in APSA format):

Waite, Linda J., Frances Koblin Goldscheider, and Christina Witsberger. 1986. "Nonfamily living and the erosion of traditional family orientations among young adults." *American Sociological Review* 51 (4): 541 – 554.

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.

Sample annotated bibliography entry for book (in APSA format):

Davidson, Hilda Ellis. 1998. *Roles of the Northern Goddess*. London, UK: Routledge.

Davidson's book provides a thorough examination of the major roles filled by the numerous pagan goddesses of Northern Europe in everyday life, including their roles in hunting, agriculture, domestic arts like weaving, the household, and death. The author discusses relevant archaeological evidence, patterns of symbol and ritual, and previous research. The book includes a number of black and white photographs of relevant artifacts.