



The Writing Center @ JSCC

Annotated Bibliographies

Annotated bibliographies are common in research writing, and you should use them whether they are assigned to you or not. They help you keep track of your sources and might help you get started on your paper, especially if you are suffering from writer's block!

Terms

A bibliography is a list of the sources you use in your research, including all journal articles, magazines, books, and websites. A bibliography usually includes just the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.), not a description of the content. Bibliographies are related to References and Works Cited pages, but unlike the latter, bibliographies usually list all of the sources you found during your research, not only those you used in your essay.

An annotation is a summary or evaluation.

When you put these two together, you get an annotated bibliography: a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources. Annotated bibliographies usually ask the writer to do one or more of the following:

- **Summarize:** Objectively tell the reader about the main points of the source. What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? Tell the reader what the source is about.
- **Assess:** Consider what you think about the source. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is it this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?
- **Reflect:** Now, think about how the source might fit into your research. Was this source helpful to you? Does it help or hurt your argument? How can you use this source in your research project?

Be sure to get guidelines from your instructor if you are asked to write an annotated bibliography for a class. What does your teacher want you to cover?

Format

If you are writing for a class, ask your instructor whether you should use APA, MLA, or some other format.

The bibliographic entries generally follow whatever style guide your course uses, usually APA or MLA. The Writing Center has handouts on both if you need help. Your annotations are usually in paragraph form, immediately following the bibliographic entry for the source. The length of the annotations will depend on your needs – do you have a short source that requires only a short summary? Do you have a complex source that requires evaluation? Is your project long or short, detailed or vague? Think about how you can use your annotations later in your final project.