How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

Run time: 4:19

You have just been given an assignment to write an annotated bibliography. Before you begin, you need to know what exactly an annotated bibliography is and how to get started.

First, what is an annotation?
An annotation is more than just a brief summary of an article, book, Web site or other type of publication. An annotation should give enough information to make a reader decide whether to read the complete work. In other words, if the reader were exploring the same topic as you, is this material useful and if so, why?

How is an annotation different from an abstract?
While an abstract also summarizes an article, book, Web site or other type of publication, it is purely descriptive. Although annotations can be descriptive, they also include distinctive features about an item. Annotations can be evaluative and critical as we will see when we look at the two major types of annotations.

What is an annotated bibliography?
An annotated bibliography is an organized list of sources (like a reference list). It differs from a straightforward bibliography in that each reference is followed by a paragraph length annotation, usually 100–200 words in length.

Depending on the assignment, an annotated bibliography might have different purposes:
**Types of annotated bibliographies**

There are two major types of annotated bibliographies:

1. Descriptive or informative
2. Analytical or critical

**Descriptive or informative**

A descriptive or informative annotated bibliography describes or summarizes a source as does an abstract, it describes why the source is useful for researching a particular topic or question, its distinctive features. In addition, it describes the author’s main arguments and conclusions without evaluating what the author says or concludes.

For example:


This editorial from the Economist describes the controversy surrounding video games and the effect they have on people who use them. The author points out that skepticism of new media have gone back to the time of the ancient Greeks, so this controversy
surrounding video games is nothing new. The article also points out that most critics of gaming are people over 40 and it is an issue of generations not understanding one another, rather than of the games themselves. As the youth of today grow older, the controversy will die out, according to the author. The author of this article stresses the age factor over violence as the real reason for opposition to video games and stresses the good gaming has done in most areas of human life. This article is distinctive in exploring the controversy surrounding video games from a generational standpoint and is written for a general audience.

Please pay attention to the last sentence. While it points out distinctive features about the item it does not analyze the author’s conclusions.

**Analytical or critical**

An analytical or critical annotation not only summarizes the material, it analyzes what is being said. It examines the strengths and weaknesses of what is presented as well as describing the applicability of the author’s conclusions to the research being conducted.

For most of your annotated bibliographies, however, you will be writing analytical or critical annotations.

For example:


This editorial from the Economist describes the controversy surrounding video games and the effect they have on people who use them. The article points out that most critics
of gaming are people over 40 and it is an issue of age not of the games themselves. While the author briefly mentions studies done around the issue of violence and gaming, he does not go into enough depth for the reader to truly know the range of studies that have actually been done in this area, other than to take his word that the research is unsatisfactory. The author of this article stresses the age factor over violence as the real reason for opposition to video games and stresses the good gaming has done in most areas of human life. This article is a good resource for those wanting to begin to explore the controversy surrounding video games, however for anyone doing serious research, one should actually examine some of the research studies that have been done in this area rather than simply take the author's word that opposition to video games is simply due to an issue of generational divide.

Please pay attention to the last sentence. It criticizes the authors research.

Please note that in these samples, the citations follow the APA format. Your instructor may require you to use another citation format, such as MLA, so check first.

To get started
Now you are ready to begin writing your own annotated bibliography.

1. **Choose your sources** Before writing your annotated bibliography, you must choose your sources. This involves doing research much like for any other project. Locate records to materials that may apply to your topic.

2. **Review the items** Then review the actual items and choose those that provide a wide variety of perspectives on your topic. Article abstracts are helpful in this process.
3. Write the citation and annotation When writing your annotation, the complete citation should always come first and the annotation follows. Depending on the type of annotated bibliography you are writing, you will want to include:

   A. The purpose of the work
   B. A summary of its content
   C. For what type of audience the work is written
   D. Its relevance to the topic
   E. Any special or unique features about the material
   F. The strengths, weaknesses or biases in the material

Annotated bibliographies may be arranged alphabetically or chronologically, check with your instructor to see what he or she prefers.

Guidelines for formatting the citations
Remember, the citations themselves must be formatted properly. UMUC has prepared these guides to help you correctly format citations according to APA, MLA or Chicago Style. Remember to check with your instructor if you are unsure which style to use.

Thank you for watching this presentation, please be sure to visit us for all your information needs.