Annotated Bibliographies

What is an annotated bibliography?

- An annotated bibliography is a list of different sources that each pertain to one particular topic.

- Unlike a traditional works cited or references page, an annotated bibliography presents more detailed information about your sources.

- You’ll still provide the basic publication information about your sources, but you’ll also briefly describe their content. The sources should be listed alphabetically by the author’s last name.

How does an annotated bibliography help me in the writing process?

An annotated bibliography helps you decide on what sources to eventually incorporate in a research paper. It also allows you to analyze the usefulness and relevance of your sources.
**What kind of sources can I use?**

You may include any type of source in your annotated bibliography, as long as it is credible and relevant to your topic. Examples of possible sources include books, anthologies, scholarly journal articles, newspaper articles, web sites and databases.

**What documentation style should I use?**

You will most likely use one of two common documentation styles to cite the sources in the bibliography: MLA or APA. MLA is most commonly used for English or literature classes, while APA is used in the science and medical fields. Your instructor may specify another documentation style to use, depending on the subject you’re writing about.

**Parts of an annotated bibliography:**

**The Topic**
At the top of your paper, state the subject area to which all of your sources relate.

**The Citation**
This section is where you provide basic information about your source, such as its title, the author’s name, information about where it was published, and any other information required by the documentation style you select.

**The Annotation**
This is the paragraph that follows your citation. Here, you will describe more detailed information about your source. Your goal in this section is to familiarize readers with the source.

**What should I include in the annotation?**

There’s no specific requirement for what you should describe about your sources. Without directly quoting from the source, your goal is simply to give readers a brief overview of the text. You may want to address a few of the following points:

**Summary** – In a few sentences, address the main ideas in the text.

**Purpose** – Comment on why the author has written what he or she has. Is the author trying to inform, entertain or persuade readers?
Audience – Who is the intended audience for the text? Is it directed specifically to people in a particular field or profession, or is it written for a general audience?

Comprehensiveness – Examine the scope of the material covered in the text. Does the author provide general or detailed information? Do you think any important information was left out? How could the source be improved?

Level of Difficulty – Is the text readable and clear? How well does the author explain confusing terminology?

Length and Organization – How long is the text you are working with? Is the material well-organized into manageable subtopics?

Graphics – Comment on the quality of any pictures, charts or tables in the text. Are the graphics helpful and relevant to the material being discussed?

Author’s credentials – Note the authors’ background and authority on the topic. Are they well-known in their field, or is this the first work they’ve published?

Example of an annotated bibliography entry in APA format:

Topic: Oil Spills


This book provides a general history of oil spills and the environmental problems they create. The text contains extensive and detailed information about the chemical makeup of oil, various types of oil spills, where these spills occur, and their effects on vegetation and wildlife. Readers do not need any prior knowledge of the topic to understand this book; anyone will appreciate this text’s clear and concise language. The book also contains numerous photographs and illustrations, including informative charts and graphs.