How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

When you are putting together a research paper or project, an important part of your process may include creating an annotated bibliography. Similar to a Works Cited or References page, an annotated bibliography consists of all of the sources that you have consulted, including books, articles, websites, films, or any other notable works. These resources ought to be formatted correctly according to the style of citation that you're using (such as MLA, APA, or Chicago). Also, these resources should be arranged in alphabetical order.

What makes an annotated bibliography unique, however, is the annotation part. After each citation, you should include a summary and an analysis of that resource. The length of these annotations may vary depending upon the nature of the assignment, but a general rule is to make it long enough to discuss the resource's usefulness and relevance to your paper's topic. Questions you could use to formulate your annotation include: What is the central argument of the text? How is that argument supported? What are the key ideas, concepts, and assumptions contained in the text? What are its strengths? Weaknesses? Who is the audience for the source? How does the source relate to other sources in the bibliography?

You should have a working thesis or argument before starting your research. This will give you a direction to go in, as well as some idea regarding the kind of information you are looking for when researching. However, as you research, your thesis will likely evolve based on the information you find.

When examining a resource, take notes concerning both the author's arguments and your reactions to them so that you can refer to them when compiling your annotated bibliography. Then, when working on the annotations, discuss how you think that resource could be useful in the context of your project. Also, you may want to compare and contrast one resource with another; this will help you make connections between what different authors are saying. Lastly, be critical and honest. Don't be afraid to disagree with someone else's views.

Annotated bibliographies can...

- help you understand what's already been said concerning your topic
- help you establish your own argument
- help you organize your resources into categories, which can help you organize the information referenced in your paper (if you choose to include it at all)
- challenge you to develop opinions regarding the resources you're using so that you can evaluate them instead of just quote from them
Sample entry:


In this book of nonfiction based on the journalist's experiential research, Ehrenreich attempts to ascertain whether it is currently possible for an individual to live on a minimum-wage in America. Taking jobs as a waitress, a maid in a cleaning service, and a Walmart sales employee, the author summarizes and reflects on her work, her relationships with fellow workers, and her financial struggles in each situation.

An experienced journalist, Ehrenreich is aware of the limitations of her experiment and the ethical implications of her experiential research tactics and reflects on these issues in the text. The author is forthcoming about her methods and supplements her experiences with scholarly research on her places of employment, the economy, and the rising cost of living in America. Ehrenreich’s project is timely, descriptive, and well-researched.

Example provided by Purdue OWL where further explanations and examples can be found: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/1/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/1/)

(Shawn Reese August 2013)