Writing an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a collection of citations (a bibliography), like a References or Works Cited page, with written annotations for each entry that summarizes and then critically evaluates the source. Annotated bibliographies are a process tool, particularly useful for larger projects, that allow you to break down a source into its main parts and tie it back to your paper. Annotations make you *read more critically instead of just collecting information*. Most annotations are 1 paragraph in length, about 150-200 words, including (1) the citation, (2) a summary of the main findings, and (3) an evaluation of the article's application to your paper. Sample annotations for APA and MLA are provided on the next page. Boise State professors frequently use a 3 paragraph format, detailed on the final page of this guide. Basic annotations will be comprised of three parts:

Citation:

Provide the citation as it would appear in your bibliography page.

Summary:

What is the primary argument, and what main points support the argument? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what the source is about, what would you say?

Evaluation:

Why is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? If so, what demonstrates its reliability? If not, what undermines the source's credibility? What is the goal of this source? How can you use this source in your paper?

Sample Annotations for APA and MLA

APA 7th

Indent by 0.5" margin, similar to a block quote. Do not indent the first line of the annotation. For multiple paragraphs, indent the first line of any paragraph after the first. Title as "Annotated Bibliography" (or simply "References").

Kimmerer, R. W. (2015). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Braiding Sweetgrass is a book-length compilation of essays by Robin Wall Kimmerer who is a botanist and a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. Each essay examines modern botany and environmentalism through the lens of the traditions and cultures of the Indigenous peoples of North America. The book is a combination of memoir, science writing, and Indigenous American philosophy and history. *Braiding Sweetgrass* explores relationships between humans and the land, with a focus on the role of plants and botany in both Native American and Western traditions. This fits my exploration of pairing pragmatic ecological relationships with esoteric rituals, both in historic and modern day settings. It will complement my section devoted to archaeological finds that reveal the symbiotic relationship of the natural world and human civilization.

MLA 9th

Indent the whole annotation by 1" margin. Do not indent the first line. If there are multiple paragraphs, indent each one, but do not add an extra space between them. Title the list as "Annotated Bibliography" or "Annotated List of Works Cited."

Anderson, Chris. Style As Argument: Contemporary American Nonfiction. Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.

Anderson devotes a chapter to the prose style of Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Joan Didion. The chapter on Didion focuses on how she uses methods of collage, juxtaposition and white space, as well as other stylistic maneuvers to render larger meanings in her essays. His analysis is interesting, but does not quite pertain to the focus of my essay; however, I do plan to use the following quote, perhaps in prospectus and/or introduction to give context to Didion's essays and mindset: "Didion fulfills the tradition of Montaigne: she is tentative and exploratory; she sees her personal experience as an index to larger issues and social problems" (Anderson 59).

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Information in this sample letter is adapted from Purdue University Online Writing Lab. (n.d.) *Annotated bibliographies.*
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/annotated_bibliographies/index.html

Quick Guide to Annotations

1. Use specific quotes from the article.

- Including quotes in your annotation lets you point to where the author(s) identify the main argument. Quotes also let you evaluate specific parts of the text and put your interpretation in conversation with the work itself. Moreover, these quotes can be helpful when you go to write your paper!

- In general, you won't need to use in-text citations within the annotation itself, as the origin of information is clear in context (for both APA and MLA). However, you'll want to include page numbers for direct quotes, and cite any (other) sources referenced in the annotation.

2. Put the article in conversation with your work.

- Annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been written in the literature and where your own research or scholarship can fit. Writing an annotated bibliography is a way to develop your own point of view: How does the source change or challenge your perspective?

- When evaluating an article, ask yourself: What does it add to your topic? What are some key pieces to include in your own project? Compare and contrast your annotations with each other, too: What patterns do you see? How do ideas in one source build on ideas in another? How do they build on your topic?

3. Identify the appropriate annotation length.

- Common length is 1 paragraph (about 150-200) words. Sometimes, the summary and evaluation will be split between 2 paragraphs (and may be closer to 200-300 words).

- Professors will usually set specific requirements for the amount, length, and scope of annotations. English classes (like ENGL 102) at Boise State regularly use 3 paragraph annotations, partitioned into three paragraphs wherein you: (1) summarize the topic and main argument[s], (2) assess the authors and context, and (3) reflect on how the source adds to your project.

4. Researching articles for your bibliography.

- Quotation marks can be used in databases like Academic Search Premier or Google Scholar to limit search results to those containing specific keywords or phrases, like "writing center" or "transfer theory."

- Academic journals (or "periodicals") are an excellent way to find peer reviewed or scholarly articles. An easy way to see if a source is from an academic journal is to see if it has a volume or issue number. Many databases have options to filter for peer reviewed articles and will identify source types for you!

- If you'd like to learn more about researching, check out our Beginner's Guide to Research!