

Annotated Bibliographies

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An annotated bibliography is a list of fully referenced sources that includes short summaries and, often, evaluations of each of the cited work's relevance to the writer's overall project. A variety of disciplines use annotated bibliographies for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, they are used to demonstrate the breadth of writing on a particular topic, issue or field of study. A typical annotated bibliography assignment in Political Science, for instance, might be to find ten scholarly sources (books or articles) on the electoral system in Canada and summarize each source. A more extensive annotation project could involve amassing all the sources available in an entire field of study. Such an annotated bibliography could include hundreds of citations and be book length.

Whether ten or 110 sources long, all annotated bibliographies have the same general purpose: to offer the reader a complete description of a work's location and contents. In order to achieve this, each annotation will include these two elements:

- a complete *citation* of each source according to the documentation style demanded in the discipline
- a thorough yet brief summary or evaluation of the source, usually called an *annotation*

Citation

The citation for each work will be determined by the documentation style (such as APA or MLA) that you are asked to use. Arranging the information within the citation is a rather mechanical process that involves the proper placement of publishing data and punctuation. To build excellent citations, however, is to be thorough and consistent. Once completed, most short annotated bibliographies arrange their individual sources alphabetically; longer ones may group smaller alphabetized citations according to thematic divisions.

Annotation

To annotate is to be *relevant* and *brief* at the same time. The annotation must be relevant because your reader wants to know the significance of the work to your goal as a researcher. However, the brevity required in most annotated bibliographies (usually less than 100 words) demands a degree of "accurate generalization" that can test a writer's summarizing skills.

Beyond exhausting the scope of the work, the contents of the annotation can vary. Some annotations will include the work's purpose or governing argument/ thesis; others will include the work's purpose or governing argument/ thesis; others will also include the main topics covered, the author's approach, and (if important) the methodology used in the study. What

you include in your annotations will be determined by the assignment and/or the area of study.

Annotations can be written with either implicit or explicit reference to authorship. It is often the case that those disciplines in the social sciences, which use an APA citation style, do the former, while those on the humanities side of things, which use MLA citation style, do the latter. This is illustrated in the difference between writing “Thompson looks at the three main effects of substance abuse on child development...” and, simply, “The effects of substance abuse on child development are divided into three areas...”

Example in MLA Style *MLA Handbook* (8th edition)

Debenport, Erin. “The Potential Complexity of ‘Universal Ownership’: Cultural Property, Textual Circulation, and Linguistic Fieldwork.” *Language & Communication*, vol. 30, 2010, pp. 204-10.

Using data from her work with Tiwa speakers of the San Antonio region of Texas, Debenport proposes that linguistic anthropologists’ language revitalization efforts pose not just pedagogical or theoretical problems, but ethical ones as well. She utilizes Jane H. Hill’s understanding of “universal ownership”—the assumption amongst linguists that world languages “belong” to everyone—to suggest that it often comes in conflict with a community’s desire to protect sacred knowledges embedded in their linguistic routines.

Example in APA Style *APA Citation Style Guide* (6th edition)

Hallett, D., Chandler, M. J., & Lalonde, C. E. (2007). Aboriginal language knowledge and youth suicide. *Cognitive Development*, 22, 392-399. doi:10.1016/j.cogdev.2007.02.001

Aboriginal language knowledge—along with factors such as health care, education, and engagement in land claims—have been identified as “cultural continuity factors” in Aboriginal communities in British Columbia, in other words as indicators of the social wellbeing of those communities. The particular factor of language knowledge is indicated where more than half of community members are conversational in their Aboriginal language. Interestingly, even when statistically isolated from other factors, Aboriginal language knowledge is empirically demonstrated to predict the mental health of Aboriginal youth in these communities, measured in terms of youth suicide rates. This renders language knowledge as a “strong predictor of health and wellbeing in Canada’s Aboriginal communities” (Hallett, Chandler, & Lalonde, 2007, p. 398).

Some annotated bibliography assignments might also require you to include an assessment or reflection on the source’s usefulness to your overall project. You should always pay attention to your instructor’s specific guidelines.

The Academic Success Centre has online and tutoring resources available to help you with MLA, APA, and Chicago styles of citing sources and documenting your academic work. Check our website for links and more information.