

Writing an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a tool to organize and analyze your research. Annotated bibliographies help you gather your sources in one place. More importantly, they help you begin the synthesis process by asking you to **summarize** the key arguments of a source and **evaluate** the usefulness of that source for your work.

Purpose of an Annotated Bibliography

You may be assigned an annotated bibliography for a course assignment, or you may write one to organize your research. Annotated bibliographies are often assigned in preparation for writing a literature review. Overall, the purpose of an annotated bibliography is to help you prepare to write a larger research project.

Each Annotated Bibliography Has Two Parts

1. **Bibliographic Citation:** an alphabetical list of the research sources in the appropriate style ([APA](#), [MLA](#), Chicago Manual of [Style](#), etc.).
2. **Annotation:** a summary and critical assessment of each source.

How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

Each faculty will have slight variations on how to write an annotated bibliography. The steps below cover the most universal structure for an annotated bibliography. For specific assignment instructions, be sure to ask your professor.

Step One: Select a Source

The quality and usefulness of your bibliography will depend on your selection of sources. To ensure that you are choosing quality sources, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the source **relevant?** Is this source related to the central problem or question you're investigating? Are you interested in the contributions this source makes to the literature on your topic?
- Is the source **credible?** Is it a peer-reviewed academic journal, a trade publication, or another type of source? Is the author biased in their argument?
- How is this source **useful?** What are the strengths and limitations of this source in relation to the problem or question you are investigating?

Step Two: Create the Citation

Create the bibliographic citation for your source: APA, MLA, Chicago Author-Date, etc.

- Reference the correct format for the bibliographic citation in the corresponding style guide.
- Place the bibliographic citation at the top of your annotation. (See samples below.)

Step Three: Write

While you draft each annotation, follow this basic organizational structure. Note that variations in structure may exist from professor to professor:

Summarize:

If you are in the social sciences or the sciences, consider these questions:

What is the purpose of the article?

What were its key findings/conclusions?

If you are in the arts/humanities, consider these questions:

What is the thesis of the article?

What are the main lines of argument?

Evaluate: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the text?

Explain: Is this text useful, or not, for your research? Why or why not?

Step Four: Revise

- Check the accuracy of your bibliographic citation.
- Have you integrated paraphrases with academic integrity?
- Does your annotation include both a **summary** and an **analysis of the source**?
- Is the writing clear and concise?

Annotated Bibliography Samples

Example 1: Ineffective

Stark, Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiiik. "Respect, Responsibility, and Renewal: The Foundations of Anishnaabe Treaty Making with the United States and Canada." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 34:2 (2010): 145-64.

In this article, Stark defines the three principles that have guided Anishanaabeg diplomacy for generations. Using the old Indigenous tale of the woman who married a beaver, Stark draws out each principle and illustrates how each has been foundational for any type of Indigenous diplomacy. She describes how any treaty between two parties must be predicated upon mutual respect. Mutual respect acknowledges the "other's" sovereignty.

Example 1 is ineffective because it simply lists the contents of the article rather than offering a summary and evaluation of the author's argument.

Example 2: Effective

Stark, Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiiik. "Respect, Responsibility, and Renewal: The Foundations of Anishnaabe Treaty Making with the United States and Canada." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 34:2 (2010): 145-64.

In this article, Starks argues that Indigenous diplomacy is guided by the principle of renewal, which is primarily about creating and sustaining relationships. She stresses that treaty-making for the Anishanaabe was about inviting the "other" into familial-type ties that would evolve over generations. Stark's argument is helpful in considering what this type of approach to relationship looks like in the composition classroom.

Example 2 is effective because it summarizes the author's argument and identifies how the source will be helpful for the student's research.