Annotated Bibliographies
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What is an annotated bibliography? An annotated bibliography is a collection of sources on a topic that includes a citation and a description of each source. They differ from reference and works cited pages in that they add an explanation that catalogue current trends, themes, and/or disagreements within each source. This allows the writer to generate ideas about the topic and build credibility by being informed about the current state of the scholarly conversation.

What are the parts of an annotated bibliography? An annotated bibliography contains a citation and a description of the source. The citation style (APA, MLA, CSE, etc.) is based on the conventions of the paper’s discipline. Citations help the writer keep track of their sources and the context of the research, such as the author, academic journal, and date.

After the citation, the writer gives an overview of the main ideas and positions of the author. Summarizing and paraphrasing main ideas allows writers to trace different arguments and themes in the scholarly conversation. Often times, including contextual information helps illustrate the author’s way of thinking. The overview will typically be 1-2 paragraphs, so clarity and brevity are important.

Here is an example of a short annotation in MLA format about writing center pedagogy:


Lunsford’s research on collaborative learning provided the basis of her reconceptualization of the ideal writing tutorial. Lunsford explained her prior devotion to two traditional writing center models: “Storehouse Centers,” in which tutors hold authority and give students knowledge of writing strategies, and “Garret Centers,” in which students hold authority and tutors seek to draw out students’ inner knowledge through non-directive questioning. But her research revealed the limitations of these models, so she came to accept that students learn best when collaborating with their peers. This led to the implementation of collaborative learning into a new writing center model: the “Burkean Parlor Center.” In these sessions, tutors facilitate peer review discussions with multiple students. Burkean Parlors combine the benefits of Storehouse and Garret centers by allowing tutor and students to hold authority equally and learn from each other. Lunsford concluded that Burkean Parlors prepare tutors and students to apply collaborative techniques beyond graduation. Writing center directors can witness Lunsford’s success in their own centers by implementing Burkean Parlor sessions.

*Note words are not typically bolded in annotations; these are examples of useful word choices.

The writer of this annotation uses MLA format, due to the conventions of English academic writing. The writer also traces the way Lunsford furthers the conversation on writing center pedagogy by studying traditional methods and adapting these methods to become more effective. By tracing these main ideas and her agreements/disagreements with current tutorial practices, the writer is able to get a full sense of past research on the topic and how it evolves over time.
Questioning the Annotated Bibliography

Q. What is an annotated bibliography?
A. A writer summarizes and briefly critiques the research source he/she used while exploring a problem. It provides a valuable “tracing” of your work and creates a guide for others that are interested in your research problem.

Q. Are there different types of annotated bibliographies?
A. There are! Here is what is typically included in each:
   a.) Summary annotated bibliographies include only summaries of the sources involved.
   b.) Informative annotated bibliographies include a summary of the source while also pointing out distinctive features. These features may include the standpoint that an author has within an argument or the conclusions the author reaches. Be sure you do not offer an analysis of these points though or else you will be writing a different kind of annotation.
   c.) Evaluative annotated bibliographies add your own critique or assessment of the work, including comments about the source’s rhetorical context, its particular strengths or weaknesses, and its usefulness or value.

Q. Let’s look at the evaluative annotation since this has features from the three different annotated bibliography types. What information should make up an evaluative entry?
A. For an evaluative annotation you should have three parts: the rhetorical information, a summary of the source’s content, and the writer’s evaluation of the source.
   a.) A summary of the source’s content will entail the writer listing what is covered in the source. This should include summarizing the source’s thesis and main argument. (This will be included in all three annotated bibliography types.)
   a.) The rhetorical information includes the rhetorical context. Basically, it notes the genre it comes from and its purpose and audience. You may ask yourself a few questions regarding rhetorical context including: is this source a scholarly article? Op-ed? A blog? What is the author’s purpose and who is the intended audience? Are there any political biases that need to be noted? (This information would be included in an informative and evaluative annotated bibliography.)
   c.) The writer’s evaluation of the source should include some critiquing of the author’s ideas. You can ask yourself a few questions to do this: What are the source’s particular strengths or weaknesses? How useful is the source for specific purposes? How might I use this source for my own research project? (This should be included in an evaluative annotated bibliography only.)

Q. Approximately how long should my entries be?
A. A longer format for annotations can be up to 300-500 words. Essentially look to use about a half page to a page per entry. However, some instructors will have shorter length requirements.

Q. What citation format should I use?
A. This depends on your instructor. Be sure to look at course materials or ask in class.

Q. How should I decide which entry comes first?
A. Your entries should be in alphabetical order.

Works Consulted:
The Cengage Guide to Research, 3rd ed. (Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo); The Norton Field Guide to Writing, 1st ed. (Bullock); Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing, 7th ed. (Ramage, Bean, and Johnson)