

Writing an annotated bibliography

A first step in reviewing the literature

What is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography provides a brief account of the available research on a given topic. It is a list of citations, each followed by a short paragraph, called the annotation, of about 150 words, commenting on the sources cited.

Depending on your assignment, in this paragraph you may reflect on, summarise, critique, evaluate or analyse the source. An annotated bibliography may be a component of a larger assignment or it may be a stand-alone document.

Why write an annotated bibliography?

Depending on your specific assessment, you may be asked to create an annotated bibliography for the following reasons:

- To familiarise yourself with the material available on a particular topic
- To demonstrate the quality and depth of reading that you have done
- To exemplify the scope of sources available—such as journals, books, web sites and magazine articles
- To highlight sources that may be of interest to other readers and researchers
- To explore and organise sources for further research, e.g. as the first step toward a literature review

What kind of resources should be studied for an annotated bibliography?

In your annotated bibliography you should review materials of an academic nature ranging from academic books dedicated to the subject, to peer reviewed journals Text books and web pages are generally not appropriate as the content may be either too broad or unreliable.

The sources you choose will depend on your topic. Your task is likely to be to find the best answer to clearly defined question or problem, so you will be searching for quite specific information. It is important that you read and select from a range of material to obtain a balanced or representative selection of materials on your topic. In other words, do not select only that material which you prefer or which you agree with. Also, ensure that you include any references which are considered central to your topic.

How to create an annotated bibliography

First locate academic sources on your particular topic. The following are good places to begin:

- Your lecture notes /references given in class
- The Lib Guide for your subject – go to: <http://www.unimelb.libguides.com/>
- The subject liaison Librarian

Survey the literature available to find texts which best address your topic or question. Read abstracts or academic book reviews to help you select appropriately. You should aim to cover a range of different approaches to your topic.

Note down complete bibliographic details for your chosen texts, in the referencing style preferred by your department.

Read and take notes on your selected texts, with attention to the author's theoretical approach, the scope of their paper within the topic, main points or findings on the topic, and the author's stance.

Evaluate as you read *and reflect this in your notes*; this way your bibliography will not merely be a catalogue, but present your own informed stance on the texts and the topic as a whole.

Ask questions as you read. How well does this text address your topic? Does it cover the topic thoroughly or only one aspect of it? Do the research methods seem appropriate and does the argument stand up to scrutiny? Does it agree with or contradict other writings on the same topic?

Create a bibliography, listing texts in alphabetical order, followed by a paragraph which summarises each text and explains how the text informs your particular topic, or answers your research question. E.g. does it provide background information? If so, what kind? Does it address a specific topical issue to go part way to answering your question? What part does this text play in creating a well rounded response to the research question?

Include any limitations or weaknesses in the text as it relates to your research topic.

What style of writing should I use?

Department style guides or detailed assignment briefs often provide information on the preferred citation style and how to use it. For further information, the most popular citation styles are explained in [re:cite](#) in the website of the university library.

The annotation should be written in complete sentences to form a cohesive snapshot of the text in words, and its contribution to your research. You will need to be highly selective and brief; aim to outline the text in less than 200 words.

What do I include in an annotated bibliography?

An annotation *may* contain all or part of the following elements depending on the word limit and the content of the sources you are examining:

- the background of the author(s)
- the content or scope of the text
- the main argument
- the intended audience
- the research methods (if applicable)
- any conclusions made by the author/s
- comments on the reliability of the text
- any special features of the text that were unique or helpful (charts, graphs etc.)
- the relevance or usefulness of the text for your research
- in what way the text relates to themes or concepts in your course
- the strengths and limitations of the text
- your view or reaction to the text

Sample annotation

Below is a sample annotation. The comments on the right, explain the features or elements covered.

McFarlane, J.K. (1973). Standards of care—what do we mean by care? <i>Nursing Mirror</i> . 143(23), 40–42.	← The citation information in the same format as it would be in the Reference List
The article examines the meaning of the word ‘care’ within a nursing context. The responsibility of nurses to provide care is legitimised in numerous documents, and the author goes on to identify key concepts related to nursing care. In particular, these concepts include assisting, helping and giving a service; offering this service to people who need help with daily living activities and to others who are affected by health deviations or illness of some kind. Moreover, the nurse’s caring role is legitimised by the patients. Finally, the article concludes by relating how these concepts are put into operation by using the steps of the nursing process — assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating the patient’s need for nursing care. The main limitation of the article is that the research was only conducted in large city hospitals. Therefore, while the article is useful for an analysis of nursing care, the limitations of its research base will require some adaption to meet the needs of this assignment that requires a commentary on services in both city and country area hospitals. (172 words)	← A short summary of the theory, research findings or argument
	← A short statement of the author’s viewpoint
	← Comments on the usefulness and/or limitations of the text for your research
	← A final evaluative comment on the work, taking into account how this work will fit into your research on a topic

Further resources

University of New England Teaching and Learning Centre. Fact Sheets. Writing the Annotated Bibliography. Retrieved from:

<http://www.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/students/factsheets/annotated-bibliography.pdf>

University of New South Wales. The Learning Centre. The Annotated Bibliography Retrieved from:

http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/annotated_bib.html

Cornell University How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography Retrieved from:

<http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill28.htm>

Owl at Purdue Annotated Bibliographies. Retrieved from:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>

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