What is an annotation?

According to the Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, it “is a succinct explanation or description of a particular item, [...] Its purpose is to guide the reader to material worth his time, to warn him of works better left to gather dust.”

There are at least 3 types of annotations:

1. **Descriptive or indicative**: This type of annotation describes the source itself without summarizing the actual argument, hypothesis, or message in the content. It describes what the source addresses or covers, what subjects or topics are included, and any special features, such as appendices or bibliographies. What it does not include is any evaluation or criticism of the content.

   This type of annotation seeks to answer the question:
   "**Does this source cover or address the topic I am researching?**"

   Example:


   An introductory section discusses the aims and techniques of industrial archaeology. Topical chapters follow on extractive industries, food and drink, construction, metal processing, transport, textiles, clothing and footwear, power, and chemicals.

2. **Informative or summative**: This type of annotation summarizes what the content, message, or argument of the source is. It generally contains the hypothesis, methodology, main points, and conclusion or results, but like the descriptive/indicative type, without any editorial or evaluative comments about such content.

   This type of annotation seeks to answer these types of questions:
   "**What are the author’s main arguments? What conclusions did the author draw?**"

   Example:


   The prevalence of idealist models depicting human behavior in a culture as determined by a set of rules, plans and programs shared by all members of that culture is severely criticized in this essay. Stating that behavior cannot be fully understood without placing it in the total behavior patterns possible for human beings, three challenges to the idealist model are put forth. These involve the areas of predicting ideas and behavior, alternative responses to situations and the absence of totally unchallenged authorities in most social situations. Idealist strategies, and their usefulness as tools for field research, are seen as somewhat incomplete.
3. **Evaluative or critical or analytical:** This type of annotation makes evaluative statements about the content of a source. It might address the strengths and weaknesses of the source or the applicability of the conclusions in relation to the subject you are researching.

This type of annotation seeks to answer these types of questions:

"Is the reasoning sound?"

*Is the author's presentation of the facts objective?*

*Is the methodology sound? Is this source useful for my audience?*

*Are the conclusions still valid in light of new research?*

*What contribution does this make to the field?*

*Does this source address all the relevant issues?*

*In short, "How does this source measure up in comparison to other sources on this topic?"*

Example:


An exemplary study of a Jewish folktale with essential theoretical conclusions. The author makes a bold attempt to present in clear, formal concepts the process by which Jewish folktales emerge and develop from biblical verses. Another important achievement of this study is the definition of the "Laws of Jewish Oicotypification" which, since this publication, serve as the basis for the study of Jewish folktales. This article is one of the most important contributions to the study of Jewish folktales in recent years.

Sample Entry


Compares the religious beliefs and attitudes of George Herbert and John Donne, especially as they relate to the tension between the Church of England and the strict Calvinists. Both Herbert's and Donne's poems, as well as Donne's sermons, are utilized as evidence. Among Martz's conclusions is that the populace's attraction to Herbert and Donne indicated the discomfort felt towards the more extreme iconoclastic and anti-sacramental elements of Puritan militants. Useful for those interested in the religious aspects of these poets' work and in their times.