Annotated Bibliography: The Format

The format of an annotated bibliography can differ depending on its purpose and the instructor. Ask your instructor for specific guidelines in terms of length, focus, type of annotation (descriptive, critical, summative), etc.

1. Annotated bibliographies may be arranged alphabetically or chronologically. Ask your instructor which is preferred.

2. The first part of your entry should contain a citation written in a standard documentation style, such as MLA or APA.

The second part is your annotation. It should summarize the material contained in the source. You may want to include the following:

- main points of the discussion
- the author’s position and credentials to speak on the topic
- useful or important information that the author mentions
- any conclusions the author may have drawn

4. Your annotation should also provide critical commentary that evaluates the source and its usefulness for your topic and for your paper, if you are writing one.

Some things to consider when writing a critical annotation are:

- Does the essay offer a good introduction on the issue?
- Does the source (or section from the source) deal with a particular aspect of the issue?
- Would novices find the piece accessible? Or is it geared to an audience already familiar with the topic?
- What limitations, if any, does the piece have (reading level, timeliness, reliability, etc.)?
- What is your overall reaction to the source?

5. If you are doing this as part of a research paper, you should describe how this piece contributes to your project.