

OWLS Writing Guides: Annotated Bibliography



An annotated bibliography is an alphabetical list of sources used for a paper or other research project, with each entry followed by an annotation that provides a brief understanding of each source listed—its purpose, content, and value to your understanding of the topic at hand or to the research project being undertaken. An annotated bibliography may be assigned as preparation for a research project, or it may be required as part of the final version of the project, as evidence of your research efforts.

Types of annotations

Annotations can take several forms. Be sure to find out from your professor what kind of annotation is required. Some annotated bibliographies are purely descriptive, wherein the annotations very briefly explain the purpose of the source and summarize its basic points, such as in this example (which uses MLA style formatting):

Harbord, Janet. *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies*. Polity, 2007. A synthesis of classic film theory and an examination of the contemporary situation of film studies that draws on recent scholarship in philosophy, anthropology, and media studies.

More typically, annotations will both summarize and analyze; that is, they offer some critical comment or assessment of the sources. This type of annotation is explained in the rest of this handout.

Parts of an annotated bibliography entry

1. Bibliographic information: The full source citation, formatted according to the reference list style assigned by your professor.
2. Annotation: Summary and assessment of the source. Annotations are presented in paragraph form, usually one or two brief paragraphs that summarize and assess the source.
 - The summary of the source explains its purpose and records its main points, omitting details and minor examples.
 - The assessment of the source analyzes and evaluates the work; that is, it offers some critical commentary: Is the work (e.g., an argument) strong and effective? Is the information reliable? Does it cover the topic thoroughly? How does this source compare with others on the topic?
 - When the annotated bibliography is presented as part of a topic proposal or preliminary research, the annotation also assesses the usefulness of the source to your research: Is this a worthwhile source for your paper or project? How might you use it? How has it changed or otherwise shaped your thinking on your topic?

Formatting

Formatting rules can vary depending upon the documentation style and the specific directions given by your professor. Generally, you should follow the style used for the rest of your paper, such as MLA or APA, unless your professor instructs otherwise. For example, if you are writing a paper using MLA style, you would follow all rules of MLA style to compile the Works Cited list, and then add the annotations to the list in a manner that observes those formatting guidelines.

MLA style: The annotation may follow directly after the citation (see the example above), or it may begin on the next line, with the first line indented as a normal paragraph.

APA style: The annotation begins on a new line, with the entire annotation indented a couple of spaces to the right of the citation, in block style (no first line indentation).

The template that follows shows how the annotated bibliography is formatted using **MLA style**. For the purposes of this illustration, the format rules for a print source (in this case a short work in a collection) are given in place of actual bibliographic information, and advice about formatting is given in place of actual annotations.

Name 1

Student Name

Professor's Name

Class

Date

My Topic: An Annotated Bibliography

Author(s). Title of source. Title of container, Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication Date, Location. If you are following strict MLA guidelines, you should start typing your annotation right after the bibliographic entry, leaving no extra space. The entire entry—bibliographic information and annotation—is indented so that the only line that is flush with the left margin is the first line of the bibliography entry. If your annotation is longer than one paragraph, indent the first line of the subsequent paragraph(s). Double-space all text. Don't leave any extra space between the entries or between an entry and its annotation.

Author(s). Title of source. Title of container, Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication Date, Location.

Alternatively, you may set the annotation off from the bibliographical entry by starting the annotation on a new line, right after the bibliographic entry and indented as a normal paragraph. Notice that the body of the annotation is still indented so that only the first line of the bibliographic entry is flush with the left margin.

[updated 9-2016]