Writing an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents and follows the appropriate style format for the discipline, i.e., MLA, APA, Chicago Manual of Style, etc. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited. Unlike abstracts which are purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes, annotations are descriptive and critical; they expose the author’s point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority.

THE PROCESS

Creating an annotated bibliography calls for the application of a variety of intellectual skills: concise exposition, succinct analysis, and informed library research.

- First, locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and documents that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic.
- Briefly examine and review the actual items. Then choose those works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.
- Cite the book, article, or document using the appropriate style.
- Write a concise annotation that summarizes the central theme and scope of the book or article. Include one or more sentences that:
  - evaluate the authority or background of the author,
  - comment on the intended audience,
  - compare or contrast this work with another you have cited, or
  - explain how this work illuminates your bibliography topic.
- The annotation should include most, if not all, of the following:
  - Explanation of the main purpose and scope of the cited work;
  - Brief description of the work’s format and content;
  - Theoretical basis and currency of the author’s argument;
  - Author’s intellectual/academic credentials;
  - Work’s intended audience;
  - Value and significance of the work as a contribution to the subject under consideration;
  - Possible shortcomings or bias in the work;
  - Any significant special features of the work (e.g., glossary, appendices, particularly good index);
  - Your own brief impression of the work.

An annotated bibliography is an original work created by you for a wider audience, usually faculty and colleagues. Copying any of the above elements is plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty.

Examples of Annotated Bibliographies

The following examples use APA format for a journal and a book citation:

The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University, use data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men to test their hypothesis that nonfamily living by young adults alters their attitudes, values, plans, and expectations, moving them away from their belief in traditional sex roles. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males. Increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families. In contrast, an earlier study by Williams cited below shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of nonfamily living.


Designed to serve as either as a writing guide or as a primary textbook for teaching philosophy through writing, the Manual is an excellent resource for students new to philosophy. Like other books in this area, the Manual contains sections on grammar, writing strategies, introductory informal logic and the different types of writing encountered in various areas of philosophy. Of particular note, however, is the section on conducting research in philosophy. The research strategies and sources of information described there are very much up-to-date, including not only directories and periodical indexes, but also research institutes, interest groups and Internet resources.

Examples of What Your Bibliography Should Not Look Like:


- I use this book to get the basic information about arthritis, it was very informative.


- I got all the facts about exercising with arthritis and the different types of exercise.

B. Kenney 9/11