

## W-14 Annotated Bibliographies

Annotated bibliographies describe, give publication information for, and sometimes evaluate each work on a list of sources. You may be assigned to create annotated bibliographies to weigh the potential usefulness of sources and to document your search efforts. This chapter describes the key elements of an annotated bibliography and provides tips for writing two kinds of annotations: *descriptive* and *evaluative*.

**Descriptive annotations** simply **SUMMARIZE** the contents of each work, without comment or evaluation. They may be very short, just long enough to capture the flavor of the work, like this excerpt from a bibliography of books and articles on teen films, documented with **MLA** style and published in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*.

Doherty, Thomas. *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*. Unwin Hyman, 1988.

A historical discussion of the identification of teenagers as a targeted film market.

Foster, Harold M. "Film in the Classroom: Coping with Teen Pics." *English Journal*, vol. 76, no. 3, Mar. 1987, pp. 86-88.

An evaluation of the potential of using teen films such as *Sixteen Candles* and *The Karate Kid* to instruct adolescents on the difference between film as communication and film as exploitation.

—Michael Benton, Mark Dolan,  
and Rebecca Zisch, "Teen Film\$"

**Evaluative annotations** offer opinions on each source as well as describe it. They are often helpful in assessing how useful a source will be for your own writing. The following evaluative annotation is from an **APA**-style bibliography written by a student.

Citation. | Gore, A. (2006). *An inconvenient truth: The planetary emergency of global warming and what we can do about it*. New York, NY: Rodale.

This publication, which is based on Gore's slide show on global warming, stresses the urgency of the global warming crisis. It centers on how the atmosphere is very thin and how greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide are making it thicker. The thicker atmosphere traps more infrared radiation, causing warming of the Earth. Gore argues that carbon dioxide, which is created by burning fossil fuels, cutting down forests, and producing cement, accounts for 80% of greenhouse gas emissions. He includes several examples of problems caused by global warming. Penguins and polar bears are at risk because the glaciers they call home are quickly melting. Coral reefs are being bleached and destroyed when their inhabitants overheat and leave. Global warming is now affecting human's lives as well. For example, many highways in Alaska are only frozen enough to be driven on fewer than 80 days of the year. In China and elsewhere, record-setting floods and droughts are taking place. Hurricanes are on the rise. This source's goal is to inform its audience about the global warming crisis and to inspire change. It is useful because it relies on scientific data that can be referred to easily and it provides a solid foundation for me to build on. For example, it explains how carbon dioxide is produced and how it is currently affecting plants and animals. This evidence could potentially help my research on how humans are biologically affected by global warming. It will also help me structure my essay, using its general information to lead into the specifics of my topic. For example, I could introduce the issue by explaining the thinness of the atmosphere and the effect of greenhouse gases, then focus on carbon dioxide and its effects on organisms.

—Jessica Ann Olson, "Global Warming"

Summary

Evaluation  
how this  
source  
could be  
used in  
my  
paper

## W-14a Key Elements of Annotated Bibliographies

**A statement of scope.** You may need a brief introductory statement to explain what you're covering. This might be one paragraph or several—but it should establish a context for the bibliography and announce your purpose for compiling it.

**Complete bibliographic information.** Provide all the information about each source using one documentation system (**MLA**, **APA**, **Chicago**, **CSE**, or another one) so that your readers or other researchers will be able to find the source easily.

**A concise description of the work.** A good annotation describes each item as carefully and objectively as possible, giving accurate, specific information and showing that you understand the source—and how it relates to your topic.

**Relevant commentary.** If you write an evaluative bibliography, your comments should be relevant to your purpose and audience. To achieve relevance, consider what questions a potential reader might have about the sources. Your evaluation might also focus on the text's suitability as a source for your writing.

**Consistent presentation.** All annotations should be consistent in content, sentence structure, and format. If you're evaluating, don't evaluate some sources and just describe others. If one annotation is written in complete sentences, they should all be. Also be sure to use one documentation style—and to treat all book titles consistently, all italicized and following a consistent capitalization style.

## **W-14b Tips for Annotating a Bibliography**

**Generating ideas and text.** You'll need to do some research to locate potential sources for your bibliography. As you consider which to include, keep your **AUDIENCE** and **PURPOSE** in mind.

**Decide what sources to include.** Though you may be tempted to include every source you find, a better strategy is to include only those sources that you or your readers may find useful in researching your topic. Consider these qualities:

- **Appropriateness.** Is this source relevant to your topic? Is it a **PRIMARY** or **SECONDARY** source? Is it general or specialized?