

Workshop on Annotated Bibliographies

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

"... a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief ... 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."¹

Why Annotate Sources?

For You

- To organise your work in a manageable format
- To help you determine how a source is important for your research
- To get you thinking about other sources you might need to complete your research

For Your Supervisor

- To demonstrate how much critical reading you have done so far
 - This does not all have to be detailed reading
- To explain how this critical reading relates to your research
- To help her/him advise you as to what further reading you need to do

How Do I Write an Annotation?

- Put the source in the correct citation style (Chicago/Turabian)
- see your copy of Turabian, and/or the Chicago Manual in the library for details
- Briefly describe the relevant content of the source
- or the significant chapter/section of the source
- Evaluate the source and explain why you are using it

An Annotation May Do All or Part of the Following:

- describe the content (focus) of the item
- describe the usefulness of the item
- discuss any limitations that the item may have, e.g. grade level, or timeliness
- describe what audience the item is intended for
- evaluate the methods (research) used in the item
- evaluate the reliability of the item
- discuss the author's background
- discuss any conclusions the author(s) may have made
- describe your reaction to the item²

¹ From "How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography," University of Cornell Library Website. Available at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/skill28.htm> (accessed 15 February 2002)

² From Owen Williams. "Writing an Annotated Bibliography." University of Minnesota, Crookston Library Website. Retrieved 29 January 2003 (<http://www.crk.umn.edu/library/links/annotate.htm>)

Annotated bibliography

Blanton, SH 2007, 'What Attracts Foreign Investors? An Examination of Human Rights and Foreign Direct Investments', *Journal of Politics*, vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 143-155.

The article examines the relationship between human rights and foreign direct investment. Blanton suspects the commonly held notion about violation of human rights by multinational corporations (MNCs), and conducts empirical analysis on this topic. The findings suggest that those countries that respect human rights are more likely to attract foreign direct investments than those who do not. This article will be useful for my paper because the author refutes a commonly accepted idea that MNCs and violation of human rights go hand in hand. Since increasing number of MNCs are investing in Macedonia, I will use the author's argument to support my claim that multinational companies in Macedonia are unlikely to be associated with abuse of human rights.

Klein, N 2005, *No Logo*, Harper Perennial, London.

Klein's book discusses the negative impacts of the multinational corporations in the poor countries. She presents the reader with shocking stories about extreme cases of human rights violation and distressing life stories of the people working in the so-called free trade zones. The significance of her book for my paper lies in the identification of the possible negative impact of the MNC. I will explore this negative impact and analyze it in relation to Macedonia. I will rely on her arguments as starting point for the counter arguments I will use in my essay.

Stanisic, N 2008, 'Do Foreign Direct Investments Increase the Economic Growth of Southeastern European Transition Economies?', *South-Eastern Europe Journal of Economics*, vol. 1, pp. 29-38. retrieved on 13.08.08 at 19:05 from http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/8875/1/MPRA_paper_8875.pdf

The paper investigates the statistical relationship between foreign direct investments and economic growth. The results of the study about the relationship between FDI inflows and economic growth in 7 southeastern European countries including Macedonia indicate that there is no statistically significant correlation between the two variables. However the author offers explanation for this lack of correlation: the transition process itself. The significance of this article can be found in the insight it offers as possible explanation why there is lack of growth although there are foreign investments. I will rely upon this argument when trying to explain why the positive impact of FDI has not been felt yet in Macedonia.

Annotated Bibliographies

Definitions

A **bibliography** is a list of sources (books, journals, websites, periodicals, etc.) one has used for researching a topic. Bibliographies are sometimes called "references" or "works cited" depending on the style format you are using. A bibliography usually just includes the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.).

An **annotation** is a summary and/or evaluation.

Therefore, an **annotated bibliography** includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources. Depending on your project or the assignment, your annotations may do one or more of the following:

- **Summarize:** Some annotations merely summarize the source. What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say? The length of your annotations will determine how detailed your summary is.

For more help, see our handout on paraphrasing sources.

- **Assess:** After summarizing a source, it may be helpful to evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?

For more help, see our handouts on evaluating resources.

- **Reflect:** Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

Your annotated bibliography may include some of these, all of these, or even others. If you're doing this for a class, you should get specific guidelines from your instructor.

Why should I write an annotated bibliography?

To learn about your topic: Writing an annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for a research project. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you have to write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information. At the professional level, annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been done in the literature and where your own research or scholarship can fit. To help you formulate a thesis: Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to

see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and you'll then be able to develop your own point of view.

To help other researchers: Extensive and scholarly annotated bibliographies are sometimes published. They provide a comprehensive overview of everything important that has been and is being said about that topic. You may not ever get your annotated bibliography published, but as a researcher, you might want to look for one that has been published about your topic.

Format

The format of an annotated bibliography can vary, so if you're doing one for a class, it's important to ask for specific guidelines.

The bibliographic information: Generally, though, the bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in either MLA or APA format. For more help with formatting, see our [MLA handout](#) or [APA handout](#).

The annotations: The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the purpose. If you're just writing summaries of your sources, the annotations may not be very long. However, if you are writing an extensive analysis of each source, you'll need more space.

You can focus your annotations for your own needs. A few sentences of general summary followed by several sentences of how you can fit the work into your larger paper or project can serve you well when you go to draft.

Sample MLA Annotation

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.

Lamott's book offers honest advice on the nature of a writing life, complete with its insecurities and failures. Taking a humorous approach to the realities of being a writer, the chapters in Lamott's book are wry and anecdotal and offer advice on everything from plot development to jealousy, from perfectionism to struggling with one's own internal critic. In the process, Lamott includes writing exercises designed to be both productive and fun.

Lamott offers sane advice for those struggling with the anxieties of writing, but her main project seems to be offering the reader a reality check regarding writing, publishing, and struggling with one's own imperfect humanity in the process. Rather than a practical handbook to producing and/or publishing, this text is

indispensable because of its honest perspective, its down-to-earth humor, and its encouraging approach.

Chapters in this text could easily be included in the curriculum for a writing class. Several of the chapters in Part 1 address the writing process and would serve to generate discussion on students' own drafting and revising processes. Some of the writing exercises would also be appropriate for generating classroom writing exercises. Students should find Lamott's style both engaging and enjoyable.

In the sample annotation above, the writer includes three paragraphs: a summary, an evaluation of the text, and a reflection on its applicability to his/her own research, respectively.

Sample APA Annotation

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

In this book of nonfiction based on the journalist's experiential research, Ehrenreich attempts to ascertain whether it is currently possible for an individual to live on a minimum-wage in America. Taking jobs as a waitress, a maid in a cleaning service, and a Wal-Mart sales employee, the author summarizes and reflects on her work, her relationships with fellow workers, and her financial struggles in each situation.

An experienced journalist, Ehrenreich is aware of the limitations of her experiment and the ethical implications of her experiential research tactics and reflects on these issues in the text. The author is forthcoming about her methods and supplements her experiences with scholarly research on her places of employment, the economy, and the rising cost of living in America. Ehrenreich's project is timely, descriptive, and well-researched.

The annotation above both summarizes and assesses the book in the citation. The first paragraph provides a brief summary of the author's project in the book, covering the main points of the work. The second paragraph points out the project's strengths and evaluates its methods and presentation. This particular annotation does not reflect on the source's potential importance or usefulness for this person's own research.

Source: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>

Developing Strong Thesis Statements

The Thesis statement or main claim must be debatable

An argumentative or persuasive piece of writing must begin with a debatable thesis or claim. In other words, the thesis must be something that people could reasonably have differing opinions on. If your thesis is something that is generally agreed upon or accepted as fact then there is no reason to try to persuade people.

Example of a non-debatable thesis statement:

Pollution is bad for the environment.

This thesis statement is not debatable. First, the word pollution means that something is bad or negative in some way. Further, all studies agree that pollution is a problem, they simply disagree on the impact it will have or the scope of the problem. No one could reasonably argue that pollution is good.

Example of a debatable thesis statement:

At least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on limiting pollution.

This is an example of a debatable thesis because reasonable people could disagree with it. Some people might think that this is how we should spend the nation's money. Others might feel that we should be spending more money on education. Still others could argue that corporations, not the government, should be paying to limit pollution.

Another example of a debatable thesis statement:

America's anti-pollution efforts should focus on privately owned cars.

In this example there is also room for disagreement between rational individuals. Some citizens might think focusing on recycling programs rather than private automobiles is the most effective strategy.

The thesis needs to be narrow

Although the scope of your paper might seem overwhelming at the start, generally the narrower the thesis the more effective your argument will be. Your thesis or claim must be supported by evidence. The broader your claim is, the more evidence you will need to convince readers that your position is right.

Example of a thesis that is too broad:

Drug use is detrimental to society.

There are several reasons this statement is too broad to argue. First, what is included in the category "drugs"? Is the author talking about illegal drug use, recreational drug use (which might include alcohol and cigarettes), or all uses of medication in general? Second, in what ways are drugs detrimental? Is drug use causing deaths (and is the author equating deaths from overdoses and deaths from drug related violence)? Is drug use changing the moral climate or causing the economy to decline? Finally, what does the author mean by "society"? Is the author referring only to America or to the