

CREATING AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

Simply put, an annotated bibliography is an alphabetically organized reference list of sources that have been reviewed for a particular topic that also includes brief evaluative descriptions of each of the sources. Note: the operative word in this discussion is "evaluative." Bibliographies may very well include abstracts, or article summaries, for the materials included, but an annotation has a different focus. The annotation may provide a descriptive overview of the source being covered, but it also includes a critical assessment of the source as part of the description. In other words, if a researcher were evaluating recent journal articles that update research on the cloning of animals for inclusion in an annotated reference list, he or she would go beyond merely summarizing article content and might examine and comment on the usefulness of the sources, comment on the reliability of the authors of the articles covered, evaluate the scope of the articles, and examine the articles' contributions to existing literature. The extent of the information included in the annotation would depend on the purpose of the bibliography and the intended audience. A highly critical, scientific audience would expect considerable detail in an annotation. A college professor might allow for less detail for a practice assignment for the purpose of teaching annotation.

How Is an Annotated Bibliography Useful?

The annotated bibliography is useful not only to the individual researcher who creates the bibliography, but also to later researchers who might follow the same or similar paths. Since each of the identified sources has been described for both content and value, the bibliography provides shortcuts to topics for further investigation. If a researcher determines in writing an annotation that the source being examined provides ground-breaking work in an area, he or she will likely want to return to the article described and pursue its line of investigation more closely. If the researcher writes an annotated bibliography to accompany another project or as a project in itself, he or she is providing other researchers with carefully described clues for further research. In short, the bibliography ultimately can save time for the creator and for the user of the bibliography.

Writing an Annotation.

Writing the annotation is the most difficult part of creating an annotated bibliography. Creating a bibliography in itself is fairly straightforward and is described in numerous writing style manuals, including the APA's and the MLA's style manuals. A writer needs only to be careful in documenting the facts about the source being listed and in properly formatting the information about the source to create a simple bibliography or reference list. Providing annotations for the sources is a different thing entirely. The researcher must not only identify the sources, but must also read them in their entirety or at least review key portions of the entire works to arrive at a critical assessment of the value. Although the annotation might include information on article or book content, one of its aims is to evaluate the article or book. Things to observe might include the availability of statistical data, inclusion of photographs or illustrations, author's qualifications, presence of a reference list, historical significance of the material, etc. In short, review the source's content and features and evaluate it in relation to the topic you are covering. A collection of essays might only have one relevant essay. In evaluating the collection, you need only comment on the relevant information rather than try to cover the entire book.

If an entire book has information relevant to your topic, hit the highlights rather than trying to cover the entire book in an annotation. Comment on the most useful chapters, on features of the book that proved useful (references, illustrations, statistics, etc.), and on the author's qualifications for writing such a book. For journal articles, focus on author qualifications, special features, recency, and references. Keep in mind that the overall purpose of the annotated bibliography is to provide other researchers with enough information about the sources you've gathered to help them evaluate and select from among them.

A Sample Annotated Bibliography (MLA Style)

Voter Apathy: An Annotated Bibliography

Voter turnout has continued to decline in America. Research suggests that the primary cause for voter apathy is that politicians are boring.

Andrews, Aaron Aardvark. "What, Me Vote? Get Outta Here!" *New Nudnick Reporter* 27 March 1994: 31-39.

Andrews investigates the prevailing attitude of a large segment of American society that voting is a waste of time. Included in his article are results from a survey of 5000 former voters.

Although brief, Andrews' discussion is key to understanding why so many Americans don't vote.

Ballistic, Byron B. "Fry Them Turkeys! Politicians Are Crooks." *Revolt and Rejection: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Political Science* 35 (March 1993): 37-58.

Ballistic provides valuable analysis of why American voters are so disenchanting with American politicians. The article is extensively researched and provides a useful bibliography of research articles that include voter surveys.

Dimwitty, Walter C. *A Brief History of the Urge to Sleep Through Televised National Election Returns*. New Narcolepsy, PA: SleepWalk Press, 1992.

This collection of essays pulls together research on voter apathy from the early 1960s through 1993. The variety of viewpoints represented here and the historical comparisons presented are the major strengths of this collection.

Dunnaw, I. "Predictors of Young Adult Voting Behavior; the Beavis and Butthead' Experience." *Annals of Antipathy* 30.1 (1995): 57-98.

I. Dunnaw's humorous satire of young voters also includes considerable research. Included are results of four surveys of first time voters conducted during the 1990s. Dunnaw's tongue-in-cheek approach to developing his article entertains but doesn't distract the reader from the issues covered in the article.

Faulty, Brain A.M. *Bud's Wiser; a Study of Why People Don't Vote*. St. Paul, MN: Say So Press, Inc., 1995.

This detailed analysis of the growing apathy among American voters comes to some startling conclusions. One of the more interesting is that 60% of American men who leave work early to

vote go instead to happy hour. One of the more useful chapters in the book is devoted to a state-by-state canvassing of voters and non-voters. Results are delivered in statistical tables and illustrated with bar graphs.

Reading by Jim Alderman. Updated March 2014.