Annotated Bibliography Guide

Definition

An annotated bibliography is a descriptive and evaluative list of citations for books, articles, or other documents. Each citation is followed by a brief paragraph - the annotation - alerting the reader to the issues/main points, accuracy, quality, and relevance of that source to your thesis and often how it fits into the scholarly conversation with other experts in the field.

Composing an annotated bibliography helps a writer to gather one’s thoughts on how to use the information contained in the cited sources, and helps the reader to decide whether to pursue the full context of the information you provide.

Format of the Bibliography

All of the citations in an annotated bibliography should be formatted according to one chosen style. Some commonly used style manuals found on the SAU Library shelves:

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association
BF76.7 .P83 2010

MLA handbook for writers of research papers
PN147 .M53 2009

The Chicago Manual of Style
LB 2369 .T8 2013

Elements of the Annotation

A typical annotation follows this outline:

1. Author information
   Who is the author? What is her/his background? Is the author qualified to write this document?

2. Author’s purpose
   What is the author’s purpose in writing this article or doing this research? Is the purpose stated or implied? Does the author have a particular message?
3. Audience information
   To what audience is the author writing (scholars, teachers, the general public, etc.)? Is this reflected in the author’s style of writing or presentation?

4. Author bias
   Does the author show any biases or make assumptions upon which the rationale of the article rests? If so, what are they?

5. Information source
   What methods did the author use to obtain the data? Is the article based on personal opinion, experience, interviews, library research, questionnaires, laboratory experiments, empirical observation, or standardized personality tests?

6. Author conclusion
   What conclusions does the author draw? Are these conclusions specifically stated or implied?

7. Conclusion justification
   Are the conclusions justified from the research or experience? Are the conclusions in sync with the original purpose of the research and supported by the data? Are the conclusions skewed by bias?

8. Relationship to other works
   How does this work compare with others cited? Does it conflict with conventional wisdom, established scholarship, government policy, etc.? Are there specific studies or writings cited with which this one agrees or disagrees? Are there any opinions not cited of which readers should be aware? Is the evidence balanced or weighted in favor of a particular perspective?

9. Time frame
   Is the work current? Is this important? How does the time in which it was written reflect on the information contained in this work?

10. Significant attachments
    Are there significant attachments such as appendices, bibliographies, illustrations, etc.? Are they valuable or not? If there are none, should there be?

Example

The following example is taken from Cornell University Library’s "How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography" (http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm).
This example uses the APA (American Psychological Association) citation style:


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.

Here we see the same example formatted in the Chicago citation style. The numbers in brackets refer to the annotation outline listed above:


The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University [1], use data from the national Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men [5] 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 [2]. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males [6]. Increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families [7]. In contrast, an earlier study by Williams [9], cited below, shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of nonfamily living [8].

The above annotation is missing only three elements from the outline:

3. Audience information
4. Author bias
10. Significant attachments

Two of these three might be implied rather than stated in the annotation. #3 could be understood through the journal title. #4 could be read through the authors’ affiliations with Rand Corporation and Brown University, and through the data set they used. #10 is not implied. You do not have to include every item from the outline in your annotation, but try to provide as much information as you can in a succinct manner.