Writing an Annotated Bibliography

Annotated bibliographies are important tools for evaluating information sources as part of the research process. This academic genre helps writers synthesize multiple relevant studies, develop a discussion of the current field, identify a potential knowledge contribution, and further the research process. Thus, in some cases, the annotated bibliography acts as a guide for a literature review, a research paper, or a doctoral comprehensive exam.

In terms of structure, each entry in an annotated bibliography is composed of two parts: first, the full bibliographic citation and, second, the annotation. This guide outlines the two components, detailing their importance and providing guidance on how to approach them.

Part 1: Full Bibliographic Citation
A main purpose of annotated bibliographies is to compile a list of key resources for a research topic or field. The full bibliographic citation for each entry, which follows an appropriate style guide for the discipline, including the use of a hanging indent, ensures the ability for both you, as the researcher, and the readers of your document to (re)find the resources, if needed. Additionally, the information included in bibliographic citations allows both researcher and readers to identify trends or patterns in a field of study: author names, publication dates, and journal titles are all necessary for mapping scholarly conversations. Finally, in academic writing, citation is not epiphenomenal (not an add-on); rather, it's an important grammatical structure and a linguistic feature with an array of complex purposes. Thus, employing full and accurate citation practices at the outset of a research endeavor helps ensure appropriate use of citation throughout the course of research.

Part 2: Annotation
Annotations include two aspects: 1) a relevant academic summary and 2) a critical evaluation. The summary may be descriptive or summative, whereas the critical portion of the annotation must be evaluative or reflective, depending on the writer's purpose. Typically, writers use a mix of these approaches (descriptive; summative; evaluative; reflective) to form a cohesive and coherent annotation for the writer-researcher and for readers.

Both the type and content of annotations must suit the particular research context; that is, writers include information about the resource that is relevant to and helps further their research project.

2a. Relevant Academic Summary
This aspect of the annotation might be descriptive, summative, or both.
> Descriptive: The annotation focuses on the disciplinary features of the text such as format, genre, and audience.
> Summative: An annotation outlining key arguments and knowledge contribution, in your own words. Direct quotes are used sparingly, if at all (a disciplinary constraint).

The annotation must provide a sufficient summary or overview of the study, demonstrate the relevance to your own research context, and, in some cases, strive for brevity and concision.

2b: Critical Evaluation

This aspect of the annotation must be evaluative, reflective, or both.

> Evaluative: The annotation offers both a stand-alone critical evaluation and a critical evaluation that makes explicit connections to the field of research. On this latter point, consider the following guiding questions: how does the study fit within the field or research area, and how does the study help further your research endeavour?

> Reflective: The annotation helps identify a research gap or problem in the field that your research could address. On this point, consider the following questions: how does this study impact or inform your research project, and how might your study respond to or ameliorate the gap or problem?

Note: The reflective portion of an annotated bibliography occurs as part of the annotation itself. However, some annotated bibliographies open with an introductory section that contextualizes the studies under review with a focus on the interrelationships among texts and the relationship of the chosen texts to their own research. The interrelationships you map out in the introductory section might be thematic, theoretical, methodological, socio-historical, and so on. That said, even if your annotated bibliography does not include an introductory section, these same types of interrelationships among the entries could be addressed in the entries themselves. Indeed, the emergence or discovery of these interrelationships is one the primary purposes of this type of academic writing activity.

Works Consulted

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