



NO. 8 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

The Annotated Bibliography

Every research paper should contain a bibliography at the end to let the reader know what sources were used in the paper. Some instructors require annotated bibliographies either before or after the drafting of the paper. The following examples are in MLA style. As always, consult other style books for modification to the style approved by your instructor.

Why use an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a useful tool for the reader and writer of a research paper. Perhaps your reader wants to know more about the subject of your paper but does not want to consult all of your sources. Perhaps one source contains information that you did not include in your paper but is still relevant to your topic.

What is an annotated bibliography and how is it written?

An annotated bibliography entry is written in the same format as a Works Cited entry, but also gives a brief summary of the information contained in the source and how helpful it was to your research. The summary is usually written in the present tense, and sentence fragments are permitted. Remember that annotated bibliographies allow you not only to cite your research but also to analyze it. Annotations do not have to be long, detailed critiques of every source; the typical annotation is usually no more than three or four sentences.

How is an annotated bibliography organized?

Usually sources are divided into categories—primary and secondary. A primary source is a first-hand account or “raw information.” Primary sources include notes from field studies, eyewitness accounts, interviews, newspaper articles, journals, diaries, etc. They are always listed first. Secondary sources include a scholar’s research on a particular topic or event, surveys, reviews, critiques, etc. They are written by people who are not directly involved with the event. The distinction between a primary and secondary source will depend on the nature of your paper.

The entries are arranged in alphabetical order. The annotations can begin on the same line as the citation or the line below.

Example:

Works Cited

Primary

Blanchard, William, ed. Thoughts from the Gold Mines: Letters from miners during the California Gold Rush. New York: New House Press, 1996.

An extensive collection of letters from men who worked in the mines in California during the Gold Rush. Contains insight into the hardship experienced by families separated by the Gold Rush.

Secondary

Jones, Timothy. Eureka! The Gold Rush in California. Atlanta, Georgia: University Press, 1995.

Explores the historical factors that led to the Gold Rush. Also looks at the rise and rapid decay of big boom towns founded during this era.

For more information on writing an annotated bibliography, see

The Chicago Manual of Style (14th ed): 514, 517, 520

The St. Martin's Handbook (5th ed): 315-17

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/AnnotatedBibliography.html>

<http://www.users.drew.edu/~sjamieso/AnnotatedBibliographies.htm>