Annotated Bibliographies

What is an annotated bibliography?
An annotated bibliography is much more than just a list of sources you found. As you list the sources - alphabetically and with all the elements of the chosen bibliographic style - for each entry, you will add a brief summary of the source in direct clear terms. Typically, this is the first paragraph, but your summary may be shorter. Then you will include a second paragraph where you provide a **critical analysis or evaluation** of the source, taking into consideration its validity and usefulness, the methodology and conclusions reached, and the potential audience.

*Note: Always check with your professor to see exactly what to include in your annotations. Also, check with your professor on the length of each annotation. Always get specific guidelines. Annotated bibliographies are sometimes organized by subject, but the grouped entries are typically listed in alphabetical order.*

Why write or use annotated bibliographies?
Annotations help you look at your sources more carefully and critically; they call for clear description, concise analysis, and informed library research. Writing annotated bibliographies gives a researcher a way to organize sources, as well as aiding other researchers interested in the same topic. When researching, browsing through annotated bibliographies can help guide your research.

What types of annotations are there?
There are three main types of annotations, and the different kinds of information can be combined, such as the summary and evaluation or evaluation and reflection, etc.

- **The summary**—this type of annotation gives a summary of the source. Begin with the thesis and develop it with the argument and/or proof.
- **The evaluation**—this type of annotation examines the source’s strengths and weaknesses. You can also state why/how the article is useful or interesting, and for whom it would be useful (someone new to the topic, someone knowledgeable about the topic, graduate students or professional, undergraduates, etc.).
- **The reflection**—this type of annotation states how it informed (or did not inform) your research. It may also state your reaction to the source: how it helped shape your argument and/or how it changed your view on the topic.

In each case, it is important to choose works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.

How should one write an annotation?
- Cite the book, article, or document using the appropriate style
- Annotations should be brief: 1-2 paragraphs is typical
- Always use the present tense: “Sterne argues...” or “Sterne states...”
- Use clear, direct language; avoid the passive voice
- Omit information that can be gathered from the title
- Omit references to background material and previous works by the author
- Mention only directly significant details
Sample Annotations

The first is an example of an annotation written in two paragraphs and complete sentences. This type of annotation is the most thorough. The first paragraph summarizes the source’s argument, and the second paragraph evaluates the source. The second annotation is less formal and written in phrases; it gives a basic summary and evaluation. The third is similar to the second in that it provides summary and evaluation, but it is written in full sentences. These are only three examples of the many different forms an annotation can take. Always check with your professor for guidelines on length, style, and content. Note the use of the third person and the use of the source author’s name only once in the beginning (and APA style for these entries).


Bedrosian states that Gary Snyder has internalized both Buddhist and American Indian myth and lore as a way through which he can apply their truths to contemporary American culture and society, as he does in his collection Myths & Texts. Snyder restates the Buddhist four noble truths for modern man’s needs. This didactic element gives bare directions in poems such as “For The Children.” At other times his poetry reads like a Zen koan designed to puzzle and shock one into enlightenment. Snyder blends myth into his texts as a way to help modern American culture by infusing it with new “cultural options.”

This article is a very thoughtful examination of Snyder’s collection Myths & Texts, yet it is hard to judge the objectivity of the author since she taught at the same university in 1993 that Snyder does now. However, this article contextualizes Snyder’s work in both the Buddhist and American Indian traditions that he draws from and reinvents.


Excellent look at Augustan satire from many different angles. Places Augustan satire firmly in context through a thorough discussion. Focuses on the attacks upon and defenses of Augustan satire. Moves quickly and sensibly through the argument; rules the defense as inadequate based upon modern notions of satire. Provides an extensive, useful bibliography. Immensely helpful to any scholar of the Eighteenth century and/or satire.


Ronald and Roskelly expand upon the possibilities that lay within Freire’s pedagogy. They make a comparison between Freire and the North American pragmatists. Discourse and action are inter-related, and process is communal, not solely individual. They expand on the idea that experience is a source of knowledge and action is a way of knowing. Freire’s four pragmatic principles of literacy and education are clearly laid out. This article fits in as a way to understand the practical applications of Freire’s pedagogy. While this article spends a lot of time on North American pragmatists, it does break down Freire’s pedagogy very well.

Can I get more help?
Yes! Visit the Learning Commons in the EMF Communications Centre. Writing Centre staff can help you interpret assignments and create a plan for your writing from beginning to completion. Library staff can provide you with reference and research assistance to help you find high-quality source materials, and suggest ways to improve your search strategies.