

Writing an Annotated Bibliography

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

An annotated bibliography provides a brief account of the available research on a given topic. It is a list of research sources that includes concise descriptions and evaluations of each source.

The annotation usually contains a brief summary of content and a short analysis or evaluation. Depending on your assignment you may be asked to reflect, summarise, critique, evaluate or analyse the source.

An annotated bibliography may be a component of a larger assignment or it may be a stand-alone assignment. While an annotation can be as brief as one sentence, the standard annotated bibliography consists of a citation followed by a short paragraph. An example is provided [below](#).

Purpose of an Annotated Bibliography

Depending on your specific assessment, an annotated bibliography may serve to:

- review the literature of a particular subject;
- demonstrate the quality and depth of reading that you have done;
- exemplify the scope of sources available—such as journals, books, web sites and magazine articles;
- highlight sources that may be of interest to other readers and researchers;
- explore and organise sources for further research.

When set as an assignment, an annotated bibliography allows you to get acquainted with the material available on a particular topic.

Questions to Consider

You need to consider carefully the texts that you select for your annotated bibliography. Keep the following questions in mind to help clarify your choices.

1. What topic/ problem am I investigating?
2. What question(s) am I exploring? Identify the aim of your literature research.
3. What kind of material am I looking at and why? Am I looking for journal articles, reports, policies or primary historical data?
4. Am I being judicious in my selection of texts? Does each text relate to my research topic and assignment requirements?
5. What are the essential or key texts on my topic? Am I finding them? Are the sources valuable or often referred to in other texts?

Which writing style should I use in the annotations?

- Each annotation should be concise. Do not write too much—remember, you are writing a summary, not an essay. Annotations should not extend beyond one paragraph unless otherwise stipulated in your assignment guidelines. As this is not an extended piece of writing, only mention significant and relevant details.
- Any information apparent in the title of the text or journal can be omitted from the annotation.
- Background materials and references to previous work by the same author usually are not included. As you are addressing one text at a time, there is no need to cross reference or use in-text citations to support your annotation.
- Unless otherwise stipulated, you should write in full sentences using academic vocabulary.
- Refer to the Learning Centre’s [online guides](#) for more academic writing strategies.

Contents of an Annotated Bibliography

An annotation may contain all or part of the following elements depending on the word limit and the content of the sources you are examining.

- Provide the full bibliographic citation
- Indicate the background of the author(s)
- Indicate the content or scope of the text
- Outline the main argument
- Indicate the intended audience
- Identify the research methods (if applicable)
- Identify any conclusions made by the author/s
- Discuss the reliability of the text
- Highlight any special features of the text that were unique or helpful (charts, graphs etc.)
- Discuss the relevance or usefulness of the text for your research
- Point out in what way the text relates to themes or concepts in your course
- State the strengths and limitations of the text
- Present your view or reaction to the text

Sample Annotation

The citation goes first and is followed by the annotation. Make sure that you follow your faculty’s preferred citation style. The summary needs to be concise (please note the following example is entirely fictitious).

In the sample annotation below, each element is numbered (see Key).

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) Trevor, C.O., Lansford, B. and Black, J.W., 2004, ‘Employee turnover and job performance: monitoring the influences of salary growth and promotion’, Journal of Armchair Psychology, vol 113, no.1, pp. 56-64. | Key |
| | (1) Citation |
| | (2) Introduction |
| | (3) Aims & Research |
| (2.) In this article Trevor et al. review the influences of pay and job opportunities in respect to job performance, turnover rates and employee motivation. | (4) Scope |
| (3) The authors use data gained through organisational surveys of blue-chip companies in Vancouver, | (5) Usefulness (to your research/ to a particular |

Canada to try to identify the main causes of employee turnover and topic) whether it is linked to salary growth. (4) Their research focuses on (6) Limitations assessing a range of pay structures such as pay for performance (7) Conclusions and organisational reward schemes. (5) The article is useful to my (8) Reflection (explain research topic, as Trevor et al. suggest that there are numerous how this work illuminates reasons for employee turnover and variances in employee your topic or how it will motivation and performance. (6) The main limitation of the article fit in with your research) is that the survey sample was restricted to mid-level management, (7) thus the authors indicate that further, more extensive, research needs to be undertaken to develop a more in-depth understanding of employee turnover and job performance. (8) This article will not form the basis of my research; however it will be useful supplementary information for my research on pay structures.

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