Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

A **bibliography** is a list of sources (books, journals, Websites, periodicals, etc.) one has used for researching a topic. Bibliographies are sometimes called "References" or "Works Cited" depending on the style format you are using. A bibliography usually just includes the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.).

An **annotation** is a summary and/or evaluation. Therefore, an **annotated bibliography** includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources. Depending on your project or the assignment, your annotations may do one or more of the following:

* **Summarize**: Some annotations merely summarize the source. What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say? The length of your annotations will determine how detailed your summary is.
* **Assess**: After summarizing a source, it may be helpful to evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?
* **Reflect**: Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

Your annotated bibliography may include some of these, all of these, or even others. If you're doing this for a class, you should get specific guidelines from your instructor.

#### **Why should I write an annotated bibliography?**

**To learn about your topic**: Writing an annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for a research project. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you have to write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information. At the professional level, annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been done in the literature and where your own research or scholarship can fit. To help you formulate a thesis: Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and you'll then be able to develop your own point of view.

**To help other researchers**: Extensive and scholarly annotated bibliographies are sometimes published. They provide a comprehensive overview of everything important that has been and is being said about that topic. You may not ever get your annotated bibliography published, but as a researcher, you might want to look for one that has been published about your topic.

#### **Format**

The format of an annotated bibliography can vary, so if you're doing one for a class, it's important to ask for specific guidelines.

**The bibliographic information**: Generally, though, the bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in either MLA or APA format.

**The annotations:** The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the purpose. If you're just writing summaries of your sources, the annotations may not be very long. However, if you are writing an extensive analysis of each source, you'll need more space.

You can focus your annotations for your own needs. A few sentences of general summary followed by several sentences of how you can fit the work into your larger paper or project can serve you well when you go to draft.

Steps to Creating an Annotated Bibliography

1. Locate and record citations of **articles and other texts** that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic. Examine and review them.

2. Cite the article/film/or literature using the MLA format.

3. Write a concise annotation that **summarizes the central theme and scope of the article**. Include one or more sentences that

* (a) evaluate the authority or background of the author,
* (b) comment on the intended audience,
* (c) compare or contrast this work with another you have cited, or
* (d) explain how this work illuminates your bibliography **topic**.

**Sample MLA Citation and Annotation**

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American Lit.

Annotated Bibliography

April 24, 2013

Annotated Bibliography

**Goode, Erica. "After Combat, Victims of an Inner War." *The New York Times U.S.*.**

**The New York Times.,1 Aug.2009. Web. 16 April 2013.**

Erica Goode, in her piece that appears in The New York Times in August 2009, explores the increasing rate of suicide among U.S. soldiers returning from active duty. She follows the case of Sgt. Jacob Blaylock who returns to the U.S. and commits suicide. Blaylock witnessed two of his comrades killed by a bomb in Baghdad. Goode uses statistics and data from a variety of sources, some of which she credits (U.S. Army commissioned study in 2008; Department of Veterans Affairs) and some of which she does not. As the New York Times is one of the most credible newspapers in the United States, and has fact checkers—as well as the journalists who report the stories—I believe Goode’s research.

We have been reading Tim O’Obrien’s collection of short stories: *The Things They Carried*. Though O’Brien’s book is fiction, he is a Vietnam veteran and uses his experiences in the war to develop his characters and stories. The trauma of war and the ways in which war affects the individual soldiers are recurring themes throughout his stories. We have also been studying *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick. This classic Vietnam War film also explores the trauma of war. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a serious illness affecting thousands of our troops.

Goode’s New York Times article illuminates the trauma of war, particularly in the way war affects the individuals involved, and thus, the society these individuals return to. As recently as the 1960s and 70s, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was unrecognized, though the atrocities our soldiers were committing were coming horribly to light (we studied the transcripts from a Congressional Criminal Investigation Committee of My Lai). In fact, up until very recently our military tried to cover up the seriousness of PTSD. Goode’s article, as well as the other literature we are studying, helps to portray the importance of getting soldiers immediate help and assuring that we help our returning troops transition to the new civilian world.