

# Annotated Bibliographies

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An **annotated bibliography** contains a list of field or topic-specific citations of books, journals, websites, visual resources, electronic sources, and scholarly articles. Below each citation is a paragraph (usually around 150 words, though, in some fields, this can be considerably longer) describing and/or evaluating the source.

## Purposes

The purpose and style of your annotated bibliography might vary depending on its context, but the most common purposes are...

- To learn about your topic: Reading and writing about a variety of sources on a similar topic with a critical eye gives you a broad understanding of both current and older/historic scholarship in the field.
- To provide a way for others to decide whether a source will be helpful to their research.
- To formulate a literature review: By understanding the scholarship pertaining to your topic, you'll be able to determine what has been ignored—or, if any new issues have arisen, what now needs to be explored.
- To find support for your thesis: With all of these sources presented in an accessible format, you can easily find the content and citation information while planning and writing your argument.

## The Annotation Process

Step 1: Identifying and Summarizing the Source

- Who is the author?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the author's main idea?
- How did the author make this argument?
- Did anything else (tone, style, organization of ideas, use of examples) about the document stand out?

Step 2: Evaluating the Source

In addition to providing summaries, annotated bibliographies, depending on their purpose, may employ one or both of the following approaches:

- **Assessment:** 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? How does the author fit into the landscape of scholarship on this topic (For example, is this author a new voice or the foremost scholar on the topic)?
- **Reflection:** How does it fit 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?

Step 3: Putting It into Paragraph Form

- Combine ideas into sentences. (For example, the information about the author and intended audience may combine into a single sentence, while the author's main idea and ways of supporting it may group into another.)
- Avoid citing quotations or invoking textual examples that are too specific.

### Format

Format citations according to field-specific guidelines (i.e., APA, MLA, CMS). Typically the page has normal margins, and the text is double-spaced—there's no need to skip a line after each entry. The entries are usually alphabetized.

- APA Example (from <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/03/>)

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

In this book of nonfiction based on the journalist's experiential research, Ehrenreich attempts to ascertain whether it is currently possible for an individual to live on a minimum-wage in America. Taking jobs as a waitress, a maid in a cleaning service, and a Wal-Mart sales employee, the author summarizes and reflects on her work, her relationships with fellow workers, and her financial struggles in each situation. An experienced journalist, Ehrenreich is aware of the limitations of her experiment and the ethical implications of her experiential research tactics and reflects on these issues in the text. The author is forthcoming about her methods and supplements her experiences with scholarly research on her places of employment, the economy, and the rising cost of living in America. Ehrenreich's project is timely, descriptive, and well-researched.

- MLA Example (from <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/03/>)

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995. Print.

Lamott's book offers honest advice on the nature of a writing life, complete with its insecurities and failures. Taking a humorous approach to the realities of being a writer, the chapters in Lamott's book are wry and anecdotal and offer advice on everything from plot development to jealousy, from perfectionism to struggling with one's own internal critic. In the process, Lamott includes writing exercises designed to be both productive and fun. chapters in this text could easily be included in the curriculum for a writing class. Several of the chapters in Part 1 address the writing process and would serve to generate discussion on students' own drafting and revising processes. Some of the writing exercises would also be appropriate for generating classroom writing exercises. Students should find Lamott's style both engaging and enjoyable.