

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

To annotate means “to make or furnish critical or explanatory notes or comment” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online). Merriam-Webster provides us with three useful definitions for bibliography:

1: the history, identification, or description of writings or publications

2a: a list often with descriptive or critical notes of writings relating to a particular subject, period, or author, b: a list of works written by an author or printed by a publishing house

3: the works or a list of the works referred to in a text or consulted by the author in its production (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online).

An annotated bibliography is a research tool; it is one document that contains descriptive and critical information about items you have found in research that might be useful.

Generally speaking, it is not something you turn in for a grade; it is “database” for your own use. In a way, an annotated bibliography is like a diary. It helps you keep track of what you have found (a description), where and how you found it (citation information), and how it might or might not be relevant to your research (critical evaluation). The annotation is the part you write; it is not a summary or paraphrase; it is your interpretation and evaluation.

The bibliographic entry is the MLA citation that is used in your Works Cited list. In this annotated bibliography, describe and evaluate the contents and attributes of the work you have found.

Example Source Citation + Annotation

Lax, Eli. *Woody Allen: A Biography* (2nd ed). New York: DaCapo Press (2002).

Lax has written the only authorized biography of Woody Allen. For more than 30 years, Lax has had full cooperation of Allen in discussions about the filmmaker’s professional endeavors and personal life. In this book, he has integrated the development of the various forms of the Allen’s work (one-liners, TV sketch work, plays, essays and films) with his personal growth and relationships. Originally published in 1992, this 2nd edition includes discussions of films since then and of Allen’s life since his contentious break in ties with actress and companion Mia Farrow. This is an essential work for understanding Allen’s history and development from his point of view.

The most practical reason for using this tool is to make the most of the research you have done and to ensure that you don’t have to “backtrack” to get the same information later on.

Also, this tool greatly speeds up your efforts to create the reference lists for the papers you write, because you will already have the reference information in the correct format. And since the

verbiage in the annotation is your reformulation of key ideas, there is no reason to worry about plagiarism if you use any of those ideas in your papers. The annotated bibliography is different from a reference list at the conclusion of a paper—it is yours.

The reference list becomes part of the paper. The reference list contains the works that are cited in your paper, whereas a bibliography contains a greater range of works related to the topic but not necessarily used in a particular paper.

The Annotated Bibliography assignment is designed to give you practice in locating sources, evaluating sources, and listing sources correctly in a references list according to MLA style. Your assignment is to prepare an annotated bibliography using MLA documentation style. The assignment has two parts:

1. The citation for the source in MLA style.
2. The annotation for the source. This annotation must contain a short summary (1-3 sentences) of the information found, an evaluation of the source (credibility, usefulness, etc.), and how it might be used in the paper you are preparing. Below is a model response containing two entries:

Subject: Psychic Phenomena

1. Cleer, Irwin. *A Psychic's Life*. New York: FlyByNight Press (2002).

This is a humorous look at the life of a modern-day psychic who tells the future by reading Tarot cards. (summary) Since it is written by the psychic herself, it is most likely accurate, but may be biased in favor of justifying her craft (evaluation). Possible use: Here is a real life example of someone who made a good living at doing something science calls bogus.

2. Harrumph, John H. "Seeing Through Psychic Phenomena." *Paranormal Journal*, 23 (2000): 312-333.

This is a scholarly examination of claims made by psychics, such as clairvoyance and ability to see the future. It is drawn from case histories over 25 years. (summary) Much of the language is difficult to read, so its usefulness may be limited (evaluation). Possible use: Great source of quotes from skeptics.

Automatic MLA Citations

Some of the software that will automatically format sources for in-text citations and your Works Cited page is free:

<http://www.citationmachine.net>

(Note: If your source is from a school's online library, choose "Work from a subscription service" format).

<http://www.peakwriting.com/VIDS/CiteMachMLA/CiteMachMLA.html>

(I have created a short instructional video on using the citationmachine.net)

Other free citation machines include:

http://www.studentabc.com/citation_machine

(Note: If you are from a school's online library, choose "Article from a database or subscription" format).

<http://webapps.calvin.edu/knightcite/index.php>

(Note: If you are from a school's online library, select "yes" to the question "Was the resource found using a database?"

Sample MLA Papers

<http://dianahacker.com/pdfs/Hacker-Daly-MLA.pdf>

*(Note: This is a pdf download and requires **Adobe Reader**.)*

http://wps.ablongman.com/long_faigley_penguinhb_1/0.7325.506868-.00.html

(Note: Has audio commentary.)