

How to write an annotated bibliography

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What is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography provides a brief account of the available research on a given topic ('annotate' means to 'make a note'). As with any bibliography, it is an alphabetical list of research sources such as books, articles, websites and documents. However, in addition to bibliographic information, the standard annotated bibliography gives a brief summary of each source, as well as some assessment or evaluation of various aspects which relate to its quality. Creating an annotated bibliography calls for the application of a variety of intellectual skills: concise exposition, succinct analysis and informed library research.

Annotated bibliography = normal bibliography (the citation) + notes on the sources (the annotation)

Why do we use annotated bibliographies?

The purpose of the annotated bibliography may be to:

- review the literature on a particular subject
- illustrate the scope and quality of your research, showing that you have read and understood your sources

- describe other items on a topic that may be of interest to the reader
- provide a way for future researchers to decide whether a source will be helpful to their own research if they read it.

How do we write an annotated bibliography?

Cite your sources first, construct a bibliography or list of references of the books, articles, websites and other documents you have consulted, using the school's accepted referencing style (in this case, the Harvard sixth edition, as included in your blue referencing manual).

Examine and review these sources, writing a concise annotation for each (use the evaluation sheet on the following page or download the user-friendly, Word version from <www.sroki.com>) that summarises the central theme and scope of the source. On this sheet, also include one or more sentences that provides a critical comment, or evaluates at least some of the following aspects of the sources (whichever are relevant to the particular source):

- Authority.
- Reliability.
- Authenticity.
- Audience.
- Relevance/usefulness.
- Reliability.
- Accuracy.
- Currency.
- Bias or objectivity.
- Methods of collection of information (research methods).
- A comparison/contrast to another work you have cited.
- Reflection of how the source adds to your knowledge of the topic, as in its usefulness or importance to your research.

When you have placed this in Word at the end of your assignment, add the annotations to all or perhaps just some of the sources listed in your bibliography, according to the instructions of your teacher. Make the bibliography or list of references in bold, so it stands out from the annotation below it. Make sure there is double spacing between the bibliography and the annotation, so the reader can easily distinguish between the citation and the annotation.

Your annotation should be between two and 10 sentences; up to 150 words maximum in length; one paragraph only. Attempt to divide up your paragraph in this way:

- Summary or description — approximately .25 of the annotation.
- Critique or evaluation — approximately .5 of the annotation.
- Reflection or closing remarks — approximately .25 of the annotation.

You should always write in complete English sentences, in academic language, and use the third person (person spoken about, for example, they, he/she, it — NOT my, or you, or I) in your annotation.

Sample annotated bibliography

The following examples use the Harvard sixth edition format for a journal citation:

Henshaw, Richard C 1997, 'Mifepristone (RU486) and abortion', *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 167, pp. 292–293, viewed 13 September 2009, <<http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/sep15/henshaw/henshaw.html>>.