

Annotated Bibliography Assignment

Overview

You will choose one topic to explore in greater depth from a list of suggested topics. In consultation with our WID Mentor, you will then develop an annotated bibliography containing five academic sources as well as a discussion of what you learned from your research.

What is an annotated bibliography?

A *bibliography* is a list of citations to sources (books, articles, films, websites, etc.) that you've used when researching a topic. An *annotated bibliography* includes a summary and evaluation of each source. These annotations are written in paragraph form and for the purposes of this class should include the following information:

1. an explanation of the main purpose of the source
2. a short summary of key findings or arguments of the source
3. the academic/intellectual credentials of the source. Does it appear in a peer-reviewed journal? Is the author someone who has expertise in the area?
4. any shortcomings or biases you notice
5. the value of this work as a contribution to the topic you're exploring.

What good is it?

The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/) has a terrific explanation of the value of annotated bibliographies. Here it is, quoted verbatim:

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 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.

How do I get started?

This project will work best if you proceed in several steps.

1. *Review the list of topics and select one or two you'd like to know more about.* If none of the topics seems interesting to you, you may suggest an alternative topic to me. All alternative topics must be approved in writing.
2. *Create a list of sources that seem directly relevant to your topic.* Begin by perusing the footnotes and endnotes in any course readings that address your topic. Then turn to the library's holdings. (An entire class session will be devoted to orienting you to the library's holdings on materials relating to gender, sexuality, and women's studies.) Your goal here is to get a broad sense of what academic information is out there on your topic. Remember that you want *academic* sources.

As you develop your list of sources, you'll probably narrow or tweak your topic in order to make the list manageable. While you must end up with *five* academic articles, all of which are directly relevant to your topic, your initial list may well have many more sources.

3. *Narrow your initial list of sources down to five.* Your primary goal here is to choose sources that address your topic directly. The best way to do that is by reading the abstracts. When possible, choose sources that reflect a variety of perspectives on your topic. Choose newer sources over older ones as a general rule.
4. *"Check in" with Max the week before your annotated bibliography is due.* Max will facilitate peer review sessions where you will get together with several of your classmates and discuss your topics and sources. This is your chance to make sure that your topic is clear and that your sources are relevant and timely. Bring a written description of your topic and the abstracts for at least five sources with you to this check-in session. Several session times will be offered. Failure to attend this mandatory check-in will drop your annotated bibliography grade by a full grade.
5. *Read and annotate your sources.* See the first page of this guide for a list of the information required in an annotated bibliography.

Note: Max will offer several workshops covering how to annotate a source and write and annotated bibliography over the course of the semester. Attendance is voluntary but will be recorded. I will take workshop attendance into account when assigning grades in borderline cases (such as when a paper hovers between an A- and a B+).

6. *Put it all together.* Your final product will contain the following elements—in this order.
- a. A description of the topic you decided to study further. This description should explain what the topic is and why you found it intriguing. Length: 200-300 words.
 - b. A discussion of the research process that led you to select the sources you did for annotation. (How did you find those sources? Why did you select these sources rather than others?) Length: 200-300 words.
 - c. The annotated bibliography. Length: no more than 200 words per source. For each source you annotate, you must also include a copy of the abstract provided by the database you searched. (That's for my benefit: you will undoubtedly find some sources I haven't read yet. The abstract will help me learn about your source.) The abstract must immediately precede each annotation. The format for this section of the project will look like this:
 source #1 abstract
 source #1 annotation
 source #2 abstract
 source #2 annotation
 etc...
 - d. A discussion of what you learned from your research. This discussion should draw obviously and explicitly from the five sources you annotated. Length: one to two pages.

The fine print

All annotations must be in paragraph form and use complete sentences. All sources must be cited using MLA format. Pages must be numbered and should be proof-read carefully for clarity, organization, spelling, and grammar.