

Centre for Learner Success – Handout Series: Assignment Types

Annotated bibliographies

An annotated bibliography contains a list of sources, with a paragraph summarising each source's content and purpose. Each source begins with a fully referenced citation, followed by the paragraph.

The 'annotation' refers to the paragraph, which aims to briefly summarise and evaluate the content of the source. The sources you select for your bibliography should focus on the same topic area.

The purpose of each annotation is to evaluate how well a particular source has addressed the topic area in its own way.

Annotation types

Read your assignment instructions carefully, as annotated bibliographies come in different variations. Most annotated bibliographies require an evaluation of the source; however, sometimes they are just a summary of different articles. The key with all types of annotated bibliographies is to keep them concise.

Check your assignment instructions, as you may be asked to do one or more of the following:

- Summarise the article
- Provide an introductory paragraph explaining the topics and themes and/or your rationale for selecting them sources
- Compare and contrast sources
- Consider strengths and weaknesses of the argument
- Show how the source is useful (or otherwise) for a particular audience or field of study

How long is the annotation?

For university assignments, 100-250 words per annotation is an average length. Sometimes annotations can be very brief with only one or two sentences. However, the assignment instructions usually specify the word limit for each annotation. If in doubt, check with your course coordinator or lecturer.

How do I start?

Take time to select a topic that leads to enough sources. Narrow this down so that you achieve a variety of approaches to the topic and source types (books, chapters in edited books, journal articles). This variation should offer opportunities for comparison and evaluation. Once you have selected the number of sources required for your assignment, begin with the source you think is the most central. This will give you a broad overview of the key issues being debated within the selected topic.

An annotation differs from an abstract, which presents an overall summary of the key issues, processes used and outcomes. You definitely need to include a summary of the key issues identified in your chosen source. However, you need to go beyond just a summary. Your annotation should provide an evaluation of the source. This evaluation can address the following five criteria:

Focus

How is the topic approached within the source? Is this approach narrow or broad in scope? Is this a central source in the topic area or is it located on the periphery?

Relevance: Is the source appropriate for its intended audience? Could any areas be improved? How well qualified is the author in the topic area? Is the author more or less qualified than others who have published in the field?

Quality

Are the arguments logically presented? Do the arguments make sense? Is scholarly evidence used to support points? Are alternative perspectives acknowledged? Are topics covered in enough depth? Have opposing pieces of evidence been omitted? Does the information summarise what others have said or does it offer something new? Is the information based on primary data, originating in the topic's context (e.g., diary entries from soldiers in WWII or data collected by a researcher studying the topic); secondary data, based on reports which summarise events or others' research findings; or a combination?

Accuracy

How recent is the source? Even if it is a recent source, published within the last two years, does it refer to recently published material? Can some of the ideas be supported by other sources you have read in the area?

General structure and design

Are clear introductory and concluding sections provided within each chapter? Is there a glossary of terms or abbreviations used within the source? Is there an index? If so, is it comprehensive? Do chapter titles clearly identify the nature of the topic under study? Is the information divided into clearly identified sub-sections, which help with understanding the development of ideas?

Make notes in order to summarise the key points, keeping in mind the word limit. Use the five criteria (focus, relevance, quality, accuracy, and general structure and design) to establish the strengths and weaknesses about the source, as appropriate.

Continue this procedure with each source, noting where there are similarities and differences among sources. These comparisons provide the opportunities for establishing further evaluation as you proceed to annotate each source.

Some useful verbs and phrases for summarising arguments

Analyses Explains
Assesses Critiques
Defends Proposes
Evaluates Questions

The author argues that ... The main argument is ...

The author identifies four main reasons for ... The article examines the concept of ...

Who would find an annotated bibliography useful?

Interested readers may want to find out if it is worth reading a specific source within your chosen area. Your annotated bibliography will provide useful information for them to judge what sources would be most and least relevant. Others may find the information useful because it provides a broad overview of the level of debate presented within a topic area. Further, you may find that the annotated bibliography offers valuable information to develop a literature review or even an essay.

Example of an evaluative annotated bibliography

This is an example of an annotation with its appropriately referenced source, using APA (7th ed.) referencing. This example is from Jingjing Jiang's annotated bibliography written for a Massey University assignment in 2006.

Thaman, K. H. (1994). Ecotourism-friendly or the new sell? One woman's view of ecotourism in Pacific Island countries. In A. Emberson-Bain (Ed.), *Sustainable development or malignant growth? Perspectives of Pacific Island women* (pp. 183-193). Marama Publications.

Thaman argues that there is an inherent contradiction between cultural conservation and ecotourism business: the latter always leads to the erosion of the former. Thaman addresses the importance of indigenous culture, and recognises the gradually increasing phenomenon of cultural alienation. She rejects applying the Western model of ecotourism in the Pacific, and incisively maintains that ecotourism has become a new sell in Pacific Islands, promoted by profits. Consequently, she advocates "ecocultural tourism development" as an alternative form of development. Further, Thaman touches on the issue of gender, and emphasises the role of education in improving people's consciousness.

Like Simmons (1993), Thaman critically examines the crucial problems of ecotourism in developing countries, rather than accepting it as unproblematic. Similar to Scheyvens (1999), Thaman emphasises the importance of local people's full participation, and social and political empowerment, but in different ways. Also like Scheyvens, Thaman believes that it is possible to promote both development and conservation. Thaman's proposal of "ecocultural tourism development" is fairly perceptive, constructive, and more radical than Scheyven's community-based approach. Although Thaman provides incisive views on ecotourism, it is difficult to change people's perceptions radically, and it is unrealistic for foreign donors to relinquish certain rights and provide aid unconditionally. Moreover, Thaman fails to find any solutions derived from the local

community's own perspective - what these people can do for their own sake, instead of depending on others.

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) website from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).