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Guidelines for an Annotated Bibliography

One way to evaluate a source is to write an annotated bibliography. An annotated bibliography is a reference citation accompanied by a brief summary of the content of the reference.

An annotated bibliography does two important things:

1. it gives a bibliographical entry to all your sources, and
2. it summarizes the contents of each book or article.

Your instructor may give you guidelines that differ from the following.

Always follow your instructor's direction when it differs from suggestions found in reference sources. If you have questions about the specifics of your instructor's assignment, always ask them for clarification and direction.

The first part of each source in an annotated bibliography, the citation, will look the same as a citation you would place in a works cited or bibliography page. You will follow the formatting dictated by the specific style (MLA, APA, etc.), alphabetizing and indenting each entry.

The second part of each source in an annotated bibliography is the annotation. This is the part the writer crafts regarding the source cited, based upon the assignment requirements. Some annotated bibliographies may summarize the source, some may assess or evaluate the source, some may reflect on the usefulness of the source for the project at hand, and some may require you to craft a combination of these or more techniques.

In general, the annotation should describe the essential details of the source, and do the following:

- Explain the main purpose of the work
- Briefly describe the contents of the work
- Indicate the possible audience for the work
- Note any special features
- Warn of any defect, weakness, or suspected bias

When writing an annotated bibliography, you should consider the author's credentials, sources, research methodology, significance and clarity of purpose, and affiliation with a professional organization.

For examples of annotated bibliographies, visit Purdue OWL at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>, and type annotated bibliographies into the search box.