How to Create an Annotated Bibliography

What is an annotation?

An annotation, according to the Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, "is a succinct explanation or description of a particular item [...] Its purpose is to guide the reader to material worth his time, to warn him of works better left to gather dust." (424)

There are at least 3 types of annotations:

1. Descriptive or indicative: This type of annotation describes the source itself without summarizing the actual argument, hypothesis, or message in the content. It describes what the source addresses or covers, what subjects or topics are included, and any special features, such as appendices or bibliographies. What it does not include is any evaluation or criticism of the content.

   This type of annotation seeks to answer the question: "Does this source cover or address the topic I am researching?"

Example:

   An introductory section discusses the aims and techniques of industrial archaeology. Topical chapters follow on extractive industries, food and drink, construction, metal processing, transport, textiles, clothing and footwear, power, and chemicals. (59)

2. Informative or summative: This type of annotation summarizes what the content, message, or argument of the source is. It generally contains the hypothesis, methodology, main points, and conclusion or results, but like the descriptive/indicative type, without any editorial or evaluative comments about such content.

   This type of annotation seeks to answer these types of questions: "What are the author's main arguments? What conclusions did the author draw?"

Example:


   The prevalence of idealist models depicting human behavior in a culture as determined by a set of rules, plans and programs shared by all members of that culture is severely criticized in this essay. Stating that behavior cannot be fully
understood without placing it in the total behavior patterns possible for human beings, three challenges to the idealist model are put forth. These involve the areas of predicting ideas and behavior, alternative responses to situations and the absence of totally unchallenged authorities in most social situations. Idealist strategies, and their usefulness as tools for field research, are seen as somewhat incomplete. (100)

3. **Evaluative or critical or analytical:** This type of annotation makes evaluative statements about the content of a source. It might address the strengths and weaknesses of the source or the applicability of the conclusions in relation to the subject you are researching.

This type of annotation seeks to answer these types of questions:

"Is the reasoning sound? Is the author's presentation of the facts objective? Is the methodology sound? Is this source useful for my audience? Are the conclusions still valid in light of new research? What contribution does this make to the field? Does this source address all the relevant issues?"  In short, "How does this source measure up in comparison to other sources on this topic?"

Example:


An exemplary study of a Jewish folktale with essential theoretical conclusions. The author makes a bold attempt to present in clear, formal concepts the process by which Jewish folktales emerge and develop from biblical verses. Another important achievement of this study is the definition of the "Laws of Jewish Orictypification" which, since this publication, serve as the basis for the study of Jewish folktales. This article is one of the most important contributions to the study of Jewish folktales in recent years. (176)

**What is an annotated bibliography?**

When you are asked to create an annotated bibliography of scholarly sources, that means that your instructor wants you to create annotations, which are a combination of the informative/summative and the evaluative/critical/analytical types. So, an annotated bibliography is a list of sources with information that describes and makes a value statement about each source. It is a research tool to assist you in synthesizing and reviewing your sources. It allows someone unfamiliar with a source to quickly get a sense of what the source is about, its arguments, and its usefulness in research.

**Purposes of preparing an annotated bibliography:**

You are being assigned to prepare an annotated bibliography as part of a research project,
and to show your understanding of a topic. Annotated bibliographies are prepared for the purpose of giving readers background information on their sources, or to give readers an idea of how their research topic has been treated by other writers over the years. You will find that your annotated bibliography will help you explore your subject and determine what the issues are within your research field.

Choosing sources for your bibliography:

Appropriate sources for annotation could be books, newspaper articles, journal articles, pamphlets, films, Web sites, or broadcast news stories. When your assignment calls for you to create an annotated bibliography with a select number of sources and write an entry for each one, it is wise NOT to just use the first few that you come across without evaluating these sources. Your method for selecting which sources to annotate will depend upon the particular assignment's purpose and instructions. There should be a rationale for why you selected the sources you did, and you may want to indicate this rationale in your bibliography. (Ex., "These works, although older, are standards in the field and the basis for much subsequent work.") The sources you choose should contribute to your discussion of the issue.

Format and content of the bibliographic entry:

You should give some thought to the best format of an annotated bibliography.

1. Annotated bibliographies may be arranged alphabetically or chronologically.
2. The first part of your entry should contain a citation written in a standard documentation style, which for this course follows the Chicago Manual of Style and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Handbook of Style.

The second part is your annotation. It should summarize the material contained in the source. You need to include the following:

* main points of the discussion
* the author's position and credentials to speak on the topic
* useful or important information that the author mentions
* any conclusions the author may have drawn

3. Your annotation should also provide critical commentary that evaluates the source and its usefulness for your topic and for your paper, if you are writing one. Some things to consider when writing a critical annotation are:

* Does the essay offer a good introduction on the issue?
* Does the source (or section from the source) deal with a particular aspect of the issue?
* Would novices find the piece accessible? Or is it geared to an audience already familiar with the topic?
* What limitations, if any, does the piece have (reading level, timeliness,
reliability, etc.?)
* What is your overall reaction to the source?

4. Finally, when you are doing this as part of a research paper, you should describe how this piece will contribute to your project.

Source: University of Maryland Libraries
http://www.lib.umd.edu/tlguides/annotated-bibliography