Guide to Annotated Bibliographies

An **annotated bibliography** is a list of citations to books, journal articles, online sources, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and documents.

Each citation is followed by a brief (about 150 words) **descriptive and evaluative paragraph** = the annotation. The annotation is provided to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy and quality of the sources cited.

The process can be broken down into these simplified steps:
1. Locate and record citations to materials that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic.
2. Briefly examine and review the actual items.
3. Choose those works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.
4. Cite the work using the appropriate citation style (*Turabian, etc.*)
5. Write the annotation.

Before getting started, consider the following points to guide your research:
- Once you have a topic, start to narrow it so that it isn't so broad. You might need to start reading on your topic first.
- Find a specific question that you want to answer.
- Consider that you aren't just gathering data. You must ask how and why this source supports the research question you've asked.
- Hone in on the problem or your paper is just a recitation of data.
- Start thinking about your hypothesis.

Also keep in mind the three different types of sources:
1. Primary – raw data, artifacts, letters, diaries, maps.
2. Secondary – books, articles, papers or reports based on the primary sources. This includes specialized encyclopedias and dictionaries.
    - You can "borrow" evidence from secondary sources to use in your own arguments, but you should ONLY do this if you do not have access to the primary sources it was taken from.
3. Tertiary – textbooks, Wikipedia, non-scholarly journals, magazines. Only use these to get a broad overview of your topic; not as a bibliographic source.

Numerous sources are required to help you test your hypothesis and develop your argument.

There are also a number of places to begin your search for these sources:
- Ask a librarian
- Consult reference works

- Explore online databases (EBSCO, JSTOR)
- Look at your library's catalog
- Search the stacks of the library
- Search citations in other sources
- Search the internet (Google Scholar)

Once you find a source, ask yourself: Is it **relevant** and **reliable**?

Make sure you are evaluating websites and sources used in your research to ensure they are legitimate and contain valid information. You can do this by considering the following points:

- **The look and feel of the website** - Reliable websites usually have a more professional look and feel than personal Web sites.
- **The URL of your results** - The .com, .edu, .gov, .net, and .org all actually mean something and can help you to evaluate the website.
- **Informational Resources** are those which present factual information. These are usually sponsored by educational institutions or governmental agencies. (These resources often include **.edu** or **.gov**.)
- **Advocacy Resources** are those sponsored by an organization that is trying to sell ideas or influence public opinion. (These resources may include **.org** within the URL.)
- **Business or Marketing Resources** are those sponsored by a commercial entity that is trying to sell products. These pages are often very biased, but can provide useful information. (You will usually find .com within the URL of these resources.)
- **News Resources** are those which provide extremely current information on hot topics. Most of the time news sources are not as credible as academic journals, and newspapers range in credibility from paper to paper. (The URL will usually include **.com**.)
- **Personal Web Pages/Resources** are sites such as social media sites: blogs, Twitter pages, Facebook, etc. These sources can be helpful to determine what people are saying on a topic and what discussions are taking place. Exercise great caution if trying to incorporate these sources directly into an academic paper. Very rarely, if ever, will they hold any weight in the scholarly community.
- **Are there advertisements on the site?** - Advertisements can indicate that the information may be less reliable.
- **Check the links on the page** - Broken or incorrect links can mean that no one is taking care of the site and that other information on it may be out-of-date or unreliable.
- **Check when the page was last updated** - Dates when pages were last updated are valuable clues to its currency and accuracy.

Cite your sources and record bibliographic data right away rather than waiting!

When composing your annotation, be sure to include these two main points:

1. Summary – This is the part where you will recap what the work is about.
   ○ What are the main arguments? What is the point of the work? What topics are covered?

2. Evaluation/Assessment – This is the part where you will consider the content of the material.
   ○ Is this source useful? How does it compare to other sources you are using? Why is this source useful for your particular topic? What is the author's authority on this subject? Is the argument valid? How large was the study conducted? Is the data still current or relevant?

What should your completed annotated bibliography **look like**? Here is one example:

Hunter, Rodney J., ed. *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

    Chiefly aimed at parish pastors, priests and rabbis, pastoral counselors, theologians and other religious workers, the work is designed to provide practical guidance and to integrate common practice with theological and social scientific theory across ecumenical and interreligious boundaries. As opposed to the brief article on "Loss and Grief" in the *Encyclopedia of Psychology* (see above), the article on "Grief and Loss" in this work is significantly longer (4 pages instead of two), as is the concluding bibliography (15 items instead of six). In addition, that article is followed by two others related to the topic, "Grief and Loss in Childhood and Adolescence," and "Grief and Mourning, Jewish Care in." Cross-references to related articles throughout the work are plentiful.

(Annotated Bibliography on Grief Research Methods in Pastoral Care and Counseling Dr. Raynard Smith)

Need more assistance or have any questions?
Call the library at 732-247-5243 or
email **Sage.Library@nbts.edu**

Sources:
Research & Learning Services, Olin Library, Cornell University Library
Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Ninth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. University of Chicago Press, 2018.