

Bibliographies (which are also called Works Cited Lists in MLA style, or Lists of References in APA style) contain complete publication information about a selection of books and articles on a particular topic. Sometimes annotated bibliographies are stand-alone assignments, but often they are part of a larger research project. Writing an annotated bibliography is good preparation for writing a research paper that requires you to use a lot of sources: completing an annotated bibliography forces you to find research materials in advance, to skim through these sources, and to summarize each of them before you move on to synthesize the material into a coherent research paper.

Annotated bibliographies take the format of the bibliography one step further. In addition to listing publication information for each source, annotated bibliographies contain “notes” about each source. These notes are written in complete sentences and are often a paragraph or more in length. They summarize and evaluate the contents of each source.

Follow these steps when creating an annotated bibliography.

1. Start by creating a bibliography. Create an entry for each of your sources using the citation style required for the assignment (e.g. see our handouts on *APA*, *MLA*, and *Chicago Citation Styles*). Organize the entries in your bibliography as you normally would—alphabetically, by the author’s last name.
2. Under each entry, write a paragraph that summarizes the source. Do not simply copy and paste an existing summary or abstract that you found on Amazon or WorldCat. Instead, try summarizing the source in your own words, avoiding direct quotation as much as possible. In your summary, address the following:
 - identify the topic or subject
 - summarize the main ideas and/or key evidence discussed in the source
 - identify the theoretical framework or methodology used by the author (if significant)
 - if the author is making an argument, be sure to include the author’s thesis statement (i.e. his/her main argument): this will likely be found at the end of the Introduction and is often restated in the Conclusion.
3. In addition to describing the source in a neutral and objective way, you may also be asked by your professor to critically evaluate or analyze the source. If so, consider the following:
 - **Author & Publication Info.** Based on his/her professional credentials and previous publications, is the author qualified to write on this topic? Can he or she provide a valid or unique perspective on it? Does the language the author uses seem subjective, emotional, or biased in some way? Is the publisher reliable: is it an academic publisher or university press? If the source is an article, does it come from a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal? When was the source published? If the source is old, is it also outdated? i.e., does its age affect the relevance or reliability of its contents?
 - **Argument.** Does the author make any missteps in the logic of his/her argument? In other words, does the author make questionable assumptions, leave out steps in his/her reasoning, or mistake simple correlations for cause-effect relationships?
 - **Evidence.** Analyze the key evidence that the author uses to support his or her thesis. Is the evidence convincing? Why or why not? Is it appropriate or relevant to the topic at hand? Could this evidence be interpreted differently? Does the author use appropriate methods to analyze the evidence? Does the author exclude or disregard certain evidence that he/she shouldn’t? Does the evidence included actually support the author’s analysis?

- **Counter-Evidence.** Does the author acknowledge counterevidence (i.e. opinions or evidence that differ from his/her own)? If so, does he or she convincingly disprove or address this counterevidence?
 - **Comparative Analysis.** Compare this book to other sources in your bibliography, or other information you have learned in class. Do these other sources contradict the information in this book? Is this book superior or inferior to these other sources, and why?
4. If you are writing the annotated bibliography in preparation for a longer research paper, your professor may also want you to add a sentence or two about how you intend to incorporate this source into your paper.
- Do you intend to use this as a primary or secondary source? (Secondary sources – such as encyclopedias, scholarly books, and journal articles – comment on or analyze primary sources, which are original materials like datasets or artifacts, or original texts like novels or historical documents.)
 - Given your evaluation of the source, how useful/reliable/valuable is this source to your research? Is it too focussed or too general to be of use? (Note: some instructors may only want you to include useful sources in your annotated bibliography.)
 - How do you plan to use this source? Does it provide background information or serve as a specific supporting example? Will it be used to support your own argument? Or is your goal to disprove or argue against it?
 - If you are writing a thesis or research paper that includes sections, in which section or chapter will you discuss this source?
5. Format your bibliography. Make sure each paragraph appears directly underneath the source it describes. The whole paragraph should be indented one TAB space. You can achieve this by applying a hanging indent: in Word 2010, select the text, and use the Indent button under the Home tab to move the text over.



If your summary and evaluation is more than paragraph, make sure that there is an empty line between paragraphs. Depending on the citation style you're using and your professor's preference, your annotated bibliography may be single- or double-spaced.