



Writing Tip Sheet: The Annotated Bibliography

Part I: Writing an Annotated Bibliography

Like a regular bibliography, an annotated bibliography is a list of sources. However, a regular bibliography lists only citation material such as title, author, and publisher. An annotated bibliography provides much more.

Besides a citation, it also includes an “annotation,” a brief paragraph (normally around 150 words) that includes the following:

1. Summation: A brief overview of the source’s content and main points.
2. Evaluation: How useful is the source? Is it credible?
3. Connection: How does the source connect to your research? What can you learn from it? How do you intend to use it? (Or, if the paper is already written, how did you use it?)

Please note that the exact content of an annotation may vary from instructor to instructor, so you should always ask your teacher for guidelines.

Part II: The Purpose of an Annotated Bibliography

In your role as a writer/researcher, an annotated bibliography can serve you in two main ways:

- It is a useful step when writing a research paper. Not only do you start to collect useful sources, but you are also forced to critically engage them right away.
- It gives you the opportunity to begin sorting through different viewpoints about your topic. You might find this helpful when trying to come up with a thesis (claim) of your own.

Perhaps the key phrase in the above sentences is “critically engage.” Critical engagement is of the utmost importance — it represents the evaluative and connective elements mentioned in Part I above. You must always include these two things when writing an annotation. It is very easy to fall into the trap of simply summarizing. You generally need to go farther than that. Engage your sources early to avoid merely regurgitating.

An annotated bibliography can also be useful to a reader:

- It demonstrates the quality and scope of your research. It helps establish your credibility.

- It can act as a resource for other researchers seeking information on your sources. (Some annotated bibliographies are published as research tools.)

Research tip: Checking the bibliographies or the annotated bibliographies of other sources is often a terrific way to gather more information about your own topic.

Part III: Sample Annotated Bibliography Entries

Here are two examples of what an annotated bibliography using the Chicago style should look like. They both are essays in larger edited volumes of work. For specific formats for citing different types of sources, please see our tip sheet *Citation Guide* or the *Chicago Manual of Style Online*.

Harries, Karsten. "The Ethical Function of Architecture." *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*. Edited by Kate Nesbitt. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996.

Harries crafts an argument that architects must remember that they have ethical responsibilities when they design. He claims that technology has given us new freedoms and allows us to go wherever we want. However, between this freedom and a developing homogeneity in design, many of us end up essentially "homeless." He feels it is the architect's responsibility to combat this homelessness with his/her designs. Harries is a philosopher at Yale University, so he is a very credible voice of authority. While I find myself not completely agreeing with his claims (too generalized), several of his statements should provide useful corroborating support for the claims I am making in my own paper.

Home: American Writers Remember Rooms of Their Own. Edited by Sharon Sloan Fiffer and Steve Fiffer. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

Home is a collection of short essays by a number of famous authors including Gish Jen, Jane Smiley and Henry Gates. Each author writes about a particular room in a house they either live or have lived in. The title of the overall text refers to the Virginia Woolf's classic *A Room of One's Own*. While a fairly informal tome, the book provides a fascinating cross-section of how people remember their homes. I may find some of these perspectives useful support material when I discuss the interiors I am writing about.

For additional research assistance, please see writing tip sheets <i>Citation Guide</i> , <i>Paraphrasing</i> , and <i>Quoting</i> .
