



# WRITING CENTER

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## **Writing an annotated bibliography**

Annotated bibliographies are a common step in the research process. Annotated bibliographies are exploratory in nature—they help writers organize their thoughts and sources about a topic and help writers determine a direction for their research. Depending on the academic discipline, purpose, and instructor preference, the style, content, and even the name of annotations can vary.

This document is a basic overview, so please confirm details of your annotated bibliography with your instructor.

### **Purposes of an annotated bibliography:**

For you: During the research and writing process, the annotated bibliography helps you, the researcher, keep track of the changing relevance of sources as you develop your ideas. It also helps you save time by focusing on each author's essential ideas (which helps you make connections between sources), and it can help you begin the process of composing your project.

For others: During the research process, annotated bibliographies also help show your instructor that you are consulting idea-generating and relevant sources and, more importantly, that you understand the significance of and relationship between your sources. When you seek assistance from your librarian, annotated bibliographies also help the librarian guide you toward the best available sources. Finally, annotated bibliographies help your writing consultant/tutor work with you more efficiently on integrating an author's ideas into your writing.

### **What is an annotation?**

Generally, an annotation provides a summary of the major ideas in a source, such as the source's thesis (argument) and major supporting details; an evaluation of the ideas and points in the source; and a sense of how the source connects with your project and other sources in the annotated bibliography.

Questions to consider as you compose your annotation:

- What is the thesis (main argument of the source), and what is the general purpose of the source?
- Who is the author and what are his/her credentials? Who is the intended audience?
- What theoretical or ideological assumptions does the author advocate that appears in the source?
- What topics does the source cover? What types of evidence does it use?
- What parts of the argument or analysis are particularly persuasive, what parts are not, and why?
- How is this source useful, or not useful, to your project? How does it help you advance the argument for your project?
- How well does the source relate to or not relate to the other sources in your annotated bibliography?

### **What are the parts of an annotated bibliography?**

1. The first part of every entry in an annotated bibliography is a **citation** of the source. Follow the citation style preferred by your instructor. Common ones include MLA, APA, and Chicago/Turabian. The citation itself is the only major difference between annotated bibliographies of different citation styles.
2. The second part of every entry is an **annotation** or description of the source. Annotations can vary in length, depending on the purposes of the annotated bibliography. Generally, the annotation will contain some information about the author's credentials/authority, followed by a brief summary of the source, taking into consideration the audience, author's viewpoint, and the thesis statement. Assessments of the source can appear anywhere, but it is commonly featured at the end of the annotation. Consider whether you found the argument or analysis persuasive, whether this source is useful to you, and why. You may also include any relevant links to other sources.

#### Sample, MLA style:

Tien, Flora and Tsu-Tan Fu. "The Correlates of the Digital Divide and Their Impact on College Student Learning." *Computers and Education* 50.1(2008): 421-436. *Electronic Journal Center*. Web. 3 Oct. 2012

Although Taiwanese scholars<sup>1</sup> Tien and Fu focus on Taiwanese college students, a significant portion of the article is pertinent to a U.S. context. First, the authors acknowledge that most discussion of the "digital divide" incorrectly simplifies the issue of technological access.<sup>2a</sup> As a result, they discuss what they call the three dimensions of the digital divide: access; use and knowledge; and skills (422).<sup>2b</sup> This recognizes what several other sources in my bibliography have touched upon: access does not mean use nor does it mean knowledge or skills to effectively use digital technologies.<sup>3a</sup> Second, they explain that many countries, the US and Taiwan included, depend upon education at all levels to combat the digital divide(s). The issue is that there are deficiencies within educational systems which sometimes work to reinforce the divides already in place.<sup>3b</sup> Tien and Fu claim, however, that educational contexts hold the most possibility for combating the digital divide(s).<sup>3c</sup> Tien and Fu claim that demographic and socio-economic background had no significant influence on accurately predicting computer use,<sup>3d</sup> which contrasts with claims of other sources such as Kirtley.<sup>4</sup> However, gender and major did appear to have an influence on computer use; Tien and Fu note, for example, that female students tended to devote more focused time on academic-related work.<sup>3e</sup> Overall, the first half of the article that breaks down the different dimensions of the digital divide is the most useful for my project.<sup>5</sup>

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1. This establishes the authority of the authors and evaluates the source's usefulness in an American context.
  - 2a/2b. Establishes the argument of the article
  - 3a. Specific supporting details; establishes connection with other sources in bibliography.
  - 3b/3c/3d/3e. Specific supporting details.
  4. Establishes connection to other sources in bibliography.
  5. Establishes usefulness for specific project.