

Self Study Programs: Annotated Bibliographies



This module covers:

- Identifying important steps in writing an annotated bibliography
- Identifying the key elements that comprise an annotation
- Effectively structuring an annotation
- Writing key parts of an annotation



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Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is, as the name suggests, a list of the information sources you have accessed (bibliography) but with helpful notes (annotations) attached.

Annotated bibliographies are an increasingly popular form of assessment as they develop key skills, such as being able to locate relevant sources of information on a topic and being able to summarise and evaluate these sources.

Each entry has two sections:

1. The Reference – the bibliographic info.
2. An Annotation – explanatory paragraph

This workshop will guide you through the basic steps in writing an annotated bibliography.

You may also like to check out the JCU [LibGuide](#) on annotated bibliographies and the [online version](#) of this workshop.

What does an *annotated bibliography* look like?

- Each source is listed down (cited) in the same way you would present it in a reference list (i.e. in alphabetical order and using the correct conventions of the referencing system you are required to use in your subject);
- Underneath each citation/source listed is a short comment – the annotation. These are *usually* about one paragraph;
- Each annotation summarises the source;
- Most assignments also want you to evaluate the source (description + evaluation);
- Sometimes, you may also be expected to reflect on how the source could be useful (or not) for your own research: (description + evaluation + reflection).

Always check your own assignment question and assessment criteria for details relevant to your own assessment task or subject.

Try Activity 1 ✓

Sample Annotation

Smart, B. (2014). How to write an annotated bibliography. *Best Journal Ever*, 20(12), 35-40.

summary

In this article Smart outlines the key steps in writing an annotated bibliography. Smart focuses on how annotated bibliographies usually have both a summarising and evaluative function. Smart outlines three descriptive steps in writing the summary part of an annotation and then goes on to outline two final evaluative steps. The clear sequencing of these steps and the numerous examples provided make this article useful for students who wish to develop their skills in writing annotated bibliographies. For help in locating relevant sources of information, however, students will have to access additional information that has a more specific focus on how to make effective use of library guides, relevant databases and the services provided by library staff.

evaluation

Additional reflection (if required) _____

1. Citation

Summary

2. Main topic/thesis.
3. Key focus/aims
4. Main point/s

Evaluation

5. Strengths
6. Limitations

Reflection

7. Reflection

“This research provides an important foundation for my own research”

How do I write an *annotated bibliography*?

Try Activity 2 

1. Locate your information!

You will need to find sources of information relevant to your topic or assignment task. The *first* place to look is in your **Subject Outline**. Your Subject Outline may include recommended readings and/or specific directions on how best to locate the sources you need. You may also like to take advantage of any subject-specific [LibGuides](#), and other workshops and services provided by the library. Knowing how to access electronic information (such as using online databases) is an important research skill.

To help you make the best use of the information you find, you will also need to know how to read and take notes effectively. You may find the following modules helpful: [effective reading](#) and [note-taking](#). The planning and research stages of the [essay writing process](#) module may also be useful.

2. Write an annotation for each piece of information

Try Activity 3 

Each annotation will usually require both a summary and an evaluation. Some annotations also require direct reflection on how the source is of relevance to your own research/task. You may find the questions in the following table helpful in organising your thoughts and notes and in structuring your annotation. There are also a range of 'sentence starters' that may help you structure your annotation (do try activity four!).

Try Activity 4 

SUMMARY	CRITIQUE (ASSESS AND REFLECT)
<p>Look for the main ideas and re-write them in your own words.</p> <p>Ask yourself the following questions to help you focus on the main ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the purpose of the work?• Who is the audience the author is writing for?• What are the main arguments?• What is the point the author is making?• What topics are covered?• To what extent is the topic covered?• What ideas and evidence is the author using to support this point?	<p>This is your critical response to the author's main points and always comes after the summary.</p> <p>Draw on all your readings of the topic and ask yourself these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the information reliable?• What does it contribute to my understanding of the topic?• What is added to the existing field of knowledge?• How does this main point integrate with other works / ideas on the topic?• Does it help me shape my argument? How? Can I use it in my research?• Would I recommend this source to others interested in this topic/ field? Why? Why not?

3. Edit

An often overlooked but important part of any assignment is to edit your writing carefully before submitting. Proofread your writing for any sentence-level errors such as spelling and grammar. Check your writing again to see if it is structured in the best way possible. **Is it clear and concise?** Finally, you may like to check your assignment against the assessment criteria in your Subject Outline. **Have you answered the assignment question?**

Your Turn: Activities

Activity 1. This is an example of an annotation. Name at least three things you immediately notice about this example.

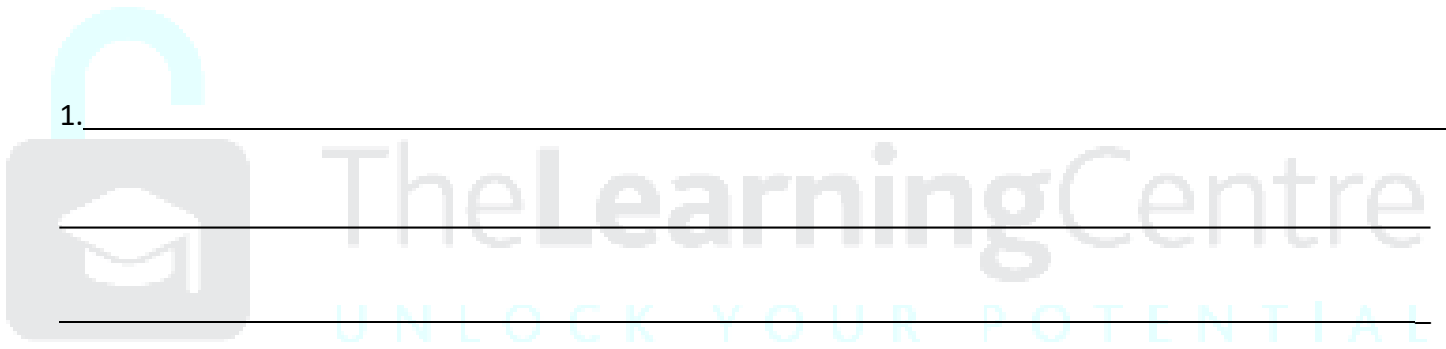
Smart, B. (2014). How to write an annotated bibliography. *Best Journal Ever*, 20(12), 35-40.

In this article Smart outlines the key steps in writing an annotated bibliography. Smart focuses on how annotated bibliographies usually have both a summarising and evaluative function. Smart outlines three descriptive steps in writing the summary part of an annotation and then goes on to outline two final evaluative steps. The clear sequencing of these steps and the numerous examples provided make this article useful for students who wish to develop their skills in writing annotated bibliographies. For help in locating relevant sources of information, however, students will have to access additional information that has a more specific focus on how to make effective use of library guides, relevant databases and the services provided by library staff.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Your Turn: Activities (continued)

Activity 2. You have been asked to write an annotated bibliography. What steps will you take to complete this assignment? Brainstorm at least three steps below (add lines, squiggles, notes – anything!).

Read the assignment question carefully; look at the assessment criteria!



Steps I would take to write an annotated bibliography



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Your Turn: Activities (continued)

Activity 3. The following annotation contains seven key elements (listed below). Using these key elements as a guide, number each sentence in the order you think would be most logical for an annotation.

Good, V., Excellent, V., Fine, V. (2013). Academic style still matters in Annotated Bibliographies. Learning Handbook 10 (07), 2-5.

1. Citation

Summary

2. Main
topic/thesis

3. Key
focus/aims

4. Main
point/s

Evaluation

5. Strengths

6. Limitations

Reflection

7. Reflection

This article is useful for my own research as it lends credence to the argument that annotations are a distinct academic genre. For data on how annotations are structured in countries outside Australia, however, I will need to supplement this resource with additional research.

Good et al. explore the role of academic style in annotated bibliographies.

In fact, the authors argue that the importance of writing style is increased when writing annotated bibliographies as each annotation is short.

Good et al. argue that academic style is still important when writing annotations.

This brevity, it is argued, increases the need for writing that is concise and well-structured.

A key strength in the argument forwarded by Good et al. is the review of over 1000 annotated bibliographies held in the academic library database; this review not only lends support to their argument for the increased importance of academic style in annotations but also provides a comprehensive showcase of how annotations are distinctly structured.

Findings are limited to annotations commonly found in academic institutions in Australia, however, and as such may not have the broader global application asserted by the authors.

ANSWER:

Good et al. explore the role of academic style in annotated bibliographies. Good et al. argue that academic style is still important when writing annotations. In fact, the authors argue that the importance of writing style is increased when writing annotated bibliographies as each annotation is short. This brevity, it is argued, increases the need for writing that is concise and well-structured. A key strength in the argument forwarded by Good et al. is the review of over 1000 annotated bibliographies held in the academic library database; this review not only lends support to their argument for the increased importance of academic style in annotations but also provides a comprehensive showcase of how annotations are distinctly structured. Findings are limited to annotations commonly found in academic institutions in Australia, however, and as such may not have the broader global application asserted by the authors. This article is useful for my own research as it lends credence to the argument that annotations are a distinct academic genre. For data on how annotations are structured in countries outside Australia, however, I will need to supplement this resource with additional research.

Your Turn: Activities (continued)

Activity 4. You may find the following ‘sentence starters’ helpful when writing an annotation. The sentence starters below have been grouped into three categories: those that start the summarising function of an annotation, those that start the evaluative function and those that start the reflective part of an annotation. Can you identify these three categories?

- Write ‘summary’, ‘evaluate’ and ‘reflect’ in the right category.
- Can you add additional examples of sentence starters in each category?

Sentence starters	The function these sentences play in an annotation (summary, evaluate or reflect)
<p>A key strength/limitation of this article is...</p> <p>The authors fail to provide sufficient evidence in respect to...</p> <p>A major oversight of the research was that it...</p> <p>The key contribution of this research is...</p> <p>Of most significance in this research was the ...</p> <p>The limited scope of the study ...</p> <p>Your own additional examples:</p>	
<p>This research has limited application to my own research as it...</p> <p>The focus on in this article is of relevance to my own research as it shows ...</p> <p>This article would need to be supplemented with...in order for it to fully address my own topic of investigation.</p> <p>Your own additional examples:</p>	
<p>The author explores/investigates/argues/shows...</p> <p>The main focus in this article is on...</p> <p>A key focus was the ...</p> <p>The three key findings in this study were ...</p> <p>The main thesis of this argument was that...</p> <p>The author contrasts...</p> <p>The authors present an overview...</p> <p>Brown et al. argue that...</p> <p>The data shows ...</p> <p>Your own additional examples:</p>	

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY - SUMMARY

- A collection of sources where the **scope** and **content** of each work is **summarized, commented on,** and **evaluated**

It has three main functions:

- Excellent preparation for research
- Provides the author of the bibliography the opportunity to learn about a specific topic
- Offers others in a specialised field comprehensive and current information about related sources

Format

The format of a bibliography can vary, so it is important to ask for specific guidelines from your supervisors, lecturers or tutors

Bibliographic details (Source Information)

- Title
- Author
- Publisher
- Place
- Date
- Page Numbers (If relevant)

Annotation

- Written in **paragraph** form and both the **summary** and the **critique** are of about equal length.
- The length of the annotation will vary depending on the purpose: eg. some bibliographies merely summarise the source

Summary

Look for the main ideas and re-write them in your own words.

Ask yourself the following questions to help you focus on the main ideas:

- What is the purpose of the work?
- Is the text descriptive or analytical?
- Who is the audience the author is writing for?
- What are the main arguments?
- What is the point the author is making?
- What topics are covered?
- To what extent are the topics covered?
- What ideas and evidence is the author using to support this point?

Critique (Assess and Reflect)

This is your critical response to the author's main points and always comes after the summary.

Draw on all your readings of the topic and ask yourself these questions:

- Is the information reliable?
- What does it contribute to my understanding of the topic?
- What is added to the existing field of knowledge?
- How does this main point integrate with other works / ideas on the topic?
- Does it help me shape my argument? How? Can I use it in my research?
- Would I recommend this source to others interested in this topic/ field? Why? Why not?

Need More Assistance? Contact The Learning Centre

In person

Visit a Learning Advice Desk located on the ground floor of the JCU Library (Townsville and Cairns)

Submit a request online

If you're not able to access our on-campus services, you can contact The Learning Centre for advice and remote assistance.

Send us a request now using our [contact form](#).

