TipSheet Annotated Bibliographies

At some point in your course, you may be asked to write an annotated bibliography, either as an entry on one source, as a stand-alone assessment, or as a list of sources you intend to use for a research paper.

This tip sheet explains what an annotated bibliography is, the benefits of writing one, and the elements it comprises.

What is an annotated bibliography?
An Annotated Bibliography is simply a list of references where each bibliographic entry is followed by a short paragraph that describes and evaluates the source. Writing one is like slowing down to narrate the process you went through to select a group of texts to use in an assignment.

What are the benefits of writing an annotated bibliography?
The skills you gain from writing an annotated bibliography can save you time as a researcher, and make the process of integrating sources into your essays and reports much easier.

How do I write an annotated bibliography?
It is important to read your assessment task description carefully before you begin your Annotated Bibliography, because expectations of what each annotation should focus on vary in each discipline and according to the complexity of your project. Occasionally, you might be asked to write additional paragraphs in the assignment, such as an introduction and conclusion, or a personal reflection on your own research journey.

Here are the steps to writing one:

1. Reference
   List the full end-text reference.

2. Describe the source
   - What is the primary purpose of the text, and what subjects are covered?
   - What is the methodology or conceptual framework?
   - Who wrote it, and are the authors reliable experts in their field?
   - Who is the intended audience? (the general public? specialists or stakeholders in a particular industry? other researchers?)
   - Is there an overall argument being made? (if so, articulate it or give a brief overview, but be succinct)

3. Evaluate the source
   This step may vary according to the assignment, but usually you will be asked to critically evaluate the source. In short, you are explaining how it can best be used as a reliable academic source. Sometimes you will be directed to explain how it could relate to a given topic or debate in your discipline. If no such focus is given, you can generally speak to the merit of the source by considering how it contributes knowledge to the field.
   - How is the information useful to another writer/researcher?
   - Is the argument compelling, convincing, and/or important? (If it is information you could use in future research, briefly explain how or why.)
   - Do any special features make the source unique or valuable?
• If it is a study, are the aims and research methods appropriate/useful in this area of research?
• Are there any limitations to the information in the text? (e.g. in terms of the methodology, specificity of information, timeframe or geographic scope of the project, etc.)

4. If you have more than one entry, order them.
Format your Annotated Bibliography according to the referencing style you’ve been asked to follow. If you are instructed to use APA (the most common referencing style at ECU), order your list alphabetically according to the first letter of each entry, and use a hanging indentation on each entry.

Examples of Annotated sources

Example 1


This article explains the dilemma faced by North American suburbs, which demand both preservation of local amenities (to protect quality of life) and physical development (to expand the tax base). Growth management has been proposed as a policy solution to this dilemma. An analogy is made between this approach and resource economics. The author concludes that the growth management debate raises legitimate issues of sustainability and deficiency.

Example 2


Judith Roof’s article takes as a point of departure the proliferation of television programs in which themes of transformation and ‘making-over’ (of one’s house, lifestyle or body) are presented. Roof argues that the ubiquity of these programs (which present work as spectacle, which couple identity and commodities, and which emphasise categories and order) indicates a deeper cultural anxiety about the instability of taxonomies, in particular the gender binary. Gender is the focus of the section of the article that discusses ‘make-over’ programs in which a subject ‘scarred by some gender unintelligibility’, in Roof’s words, is transformed into a normative ideal of their gender by cosmetic surgery, diet, exercise regimes, make-up and wardrobe. Interestingly, such programs, which represent ‘gender conformity’ as both commodity and cure-all, also foreground the ‘work’ that the normatively gendered body requires to maintain itself. The repetition of these narratives of metamorphosis into the gender norm, she suggests, are a compensatory mechanism, a staving off of the notion of fluid, hybrid and multiple genders, a strident reassertion of the gender binary. Although my research will focus on texts of an entirely different genre and era (and thus the analysis of make-over programs themselves is of little utility to my project) Roof provides a useful theoretical framework for a discussion of fin-de-siecle cultural anxiety about the fluidity of identity.

References