The Annotated Bibliography: A Researcher's Companion

**Definition**
A bibliography is a list of sources (books, journals, websites, periodicals, etc.) one has used for researching a topic. A bibliography usually just includes the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.). An annotation is a summary and/or evaluation. Therefore, an annotated bibliography includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources. Depending on your project or the assignment, your annotations will do each of the following:

**Summarize:** Some annotations merely summarize the source. What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say? The length of your annotations will determine how detailed your summary is. (see attached handout on "Paraphrasing Sources."

**Assess:** After summarizing a source, it may be helpful to evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is it this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source? (see attached handout on "Evaluating Resources."

**Reflect:** Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

**Purpose**
*To learn about your topic:* Writing an annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for a research project. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you have to write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information.

*To help you formulate a thesis:* Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and you'll then be able to develop your own point of view.

*To help other researchers:* Extensive and scholarly annotated bibliographies are sometimes published. They provide a comprehensive overview of everything that has been and is being said about that topic. You may not ever get your annotated bibliography published, but as a researcher, you might want to look for one that has been published about your topic.
Requirements for your Annotated Bibliography

Format
The bibliographic information: Generally, though, the bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in MLA Format. (see MLA Handbook on Tedder's Tea Room for help with this.) Don't forget to double space!

The annotations: The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the text. You should include three paragraphs for each source: a summary paragraph, an assessment paragraph, and a reflective paragraph.

Required Number of Entries:
While you may indeed use more than the required number of sources (and most likely you will!), I am requiring that the following number and types of sources appear on your annotated bibliography:

1 News Source
1 Scholarly / Professional Journal Source
1 Magazine Source
1 Book Source
1 Internet Source

Remember, this assignment is designed to HELP you on your academic journey toward becoming the experts on your topic. It is designed to assist you in multiple ways:

* You will use this to "weed out" sources that will be of no use to you.
* You will use this to categorize potential information for your argument - in other words, you'll be able to tell what section of your outline this will fill.
* You will later use the correctly cited bibliographic information to easily construct your Works Cited list for your final paper.
* You will use this to critically analyze the contents of each source to avoid playing the "numbers" game (i.e., slapping information down on notecards just to have the correct number of notecards to turn in on the due date, only to gasp in horror at the later realization that the information you've put on the cards has absolutely NOTHING to do with your paper!)

Due Date:
Your Annotated Bibliography will be due no later than ________________________________ by the end of the day. Your name should appear in the top right hand corner of the paper, and should follow the format of the example supplied on the following page.
Stem Cell Research: An Annotated Bibliography


This is the annotation of the above source. In this example, I am following MLA guidelines for the bibliographic information listed above. If I were really writing an annotation for this source, I would now be offering a brief summary of what this book says about stem cell research.

After a brief summary, it would be appropriate to assess / evaluate this source and offer some criticisms of it. Does it seem like a reliable and current source? Why? Is the research biased or objective? Are the facts well documented? Who is the author? Is she qualified in this subject? Is this source scholarly, popular, some of both?

The length of your annotation will depend on the assignment or on the purpose of your annotated bibliography. After summarizing and assessing, you can now reflect on this source. How does it fit into your research? Is this a helpful resource? Too scholarly? Not scholarly enough? Too general/specific? Since "stem cell research" is a very broad topic, has this source helped you to narrow your topic?


Not all annotations have to be the same length. For example, this source is a very short scholarly article. It may only take a sentence or two to summarize. Even if you are using a book, you should only focus on the sections that relate to your topic.
Not all annotated bibliographies assess and reflect; some merely summarize. That may not be the most helpful for you, but, if this is an assignment, you should always ask your instructor for specific guidelines.


Notice that in this example, I have chosen a variety of sources: a book, a scholarly journal, and a web page. Using a variety of sources can help give you a broader picture of what is being said about your topic. You may want to investigate how scholarly sources are treating this topic differently than more popular sources. But again, if your assignment is to only use scholarly sources, then you will probably want to avoid magazines and popular web sites.

Notice that the bibliographic information above is proper MLA format (use whatever style is appropriate in your field) and the annotations are in paragraph form. Note also that the entries are alphabetized by the first word in the bibliographic entry. If you are writing an annotated bibliography with many sources, it may be helpful to divide the sources into categories. For example, if I was putting together an extensive annotated bibliography for stem cell research, I may divide the sources into categories such as ethical concerns, scholarly analyses, and political ramifications.

For more examples, a quick search at a library or even on the Internet should produce several examples of annotated bibliographies in your area.
The Effects of Media Violence on Youth Research


The article “Violent Fantasy….,” is a decent article, discussing other negative aspects of media, as opposed to violence. When discussing violence, this article talks of age-old violence that can’t be escaped because it has been around as long as time. For example, in Renaissance literature written by Shakespeare, most famously *Romeo and Juliet*, the main characters kill themselves. According to this article, media violence is nothing new, and nothing that can be helped.

This article, taken from the magazine *The National Review*, is very well written, and even though the focus is not just media violence, the information provided for the violence is useful. However, I find this article to be biased, because references are made mainly to democrats and their viewpoints, and being a republican, I don’t find these views to be all that useful.

This article will be helpful with broadening my examples in my paper. Although there are no statistics, the references to popular and well-known movies, actors, and directors will be able to help shape my argument.


“The promise and the reality…” is a credible source that discusses both viewpoints for the argument on media violence and its affect on youth. This article discusses studies done by the FTC in three main media outlets: movies, music, and video games. In each section dedicated to discussing the positive and negative aspects of each outlet mentioned, many statistics and studies are used as examples to support the argument given by the author. The article cites many instances where the violence is only seen by children and young teens due to the negligence of parents and those working the point-of-sale area where the kids gain access to R-rated movies, M-rated video games, and CDs with “Parental Caution: Explicit Content” labels. This article also gives detailed comparisons of media now and media at the beginning of the 1900’s when films first came about. Although the article defines the problem, and supports a solution, no real solution is clearly discussed.

This article is a very credible resource, as it is published in the magazine World and I. The article is written by a professor of criminal justice and legal studies from the University of Central Florida, who has published a book on media violence, and written many articles on the same topic. The article also uses statistics taken from studies done by the Federal Trade Commission. Although the author seems to believe that media violence does affect the youth in a negative way, he does an exceptional job at remaining neutral in his writing, with only a few exceptions, and has solid statistics and facts to back up his article. This source, although published in 2001, is still useful.

This source was very helpful in developing my argument. With its numerous amount of statistics, the article gives me a solid base on which to build my argument. The statistics will also be helpful when debating with the opposing viewpoints, because this article includes statistics for both sides of the argument, and a fair comparison will be able to be made. I can use many of the facts in this article to make my argument and my paper stronger.