

Annotated Bibliographies

A bibliography is a complete list of sources a writer has used to research a project, providing author, title, and other basic publication information. An **annotated bibliography** is a specialized list of sources that includes the usual publication information for individual sources as well as **annotations**.

An annotation summarizes and evaluates each source. Annotations typically include a synopsis of the source, its main points, the stance it takes (if it is an argument), the findings, and other factual information. Determining additional categories to include often depends upon the professor's requirements, but consider the following items:

- how a source fits in with your other sources,
- what is valuable about a source,
- how it compares to other sources, or
- how it helps shape your understanding of the overall topic.

In short, you must explore the reasons for including each source in the annotated bibliography.

Purpose

An annotated bibliography differs from a regular bibliography in that it is often a stand-alone assignment intended to help the student become familiar with a subject. Annotated bibliographies can also be helpful to future researchers of a specific author or topic.

Format

Although the final format of your annotated bibliography depends on your professor's instructions, keep these tips in mind:

- Basic publication information should appear in MLA or APA format at the beginning of each source listing. (Use a different format if required for your class.)
- Some professors will require that you break the annotation into categories, and others will not. Either way, use complete sentences in paragraph form.
- Annotation length can vary from a sentence to several pages, depending on the assignment.
- When using information from the jacket of a book, book review, or online search, make sure to attribute it.

Types of Annotated Bibliographies

Annotated bibliographies vary according to the class and the professor's requirements, but there are two basic types: **author-based** and **topic-based**.

Author-Based

An author-based annotated bibliography lists all the works of a single author, including books, stories, articles, publications in literary or peer-reviewed journals, and any other publications by that author. Each entry begins with basic reference information before moving on to the annotation.

Common categories for author-based annotated bibliographies include a synopsis of the work, its genre, critical reception, awards it may have won, an excerpt from a book review, its significance in the author's career, or other specific interesting information about the source (e.g., if a particular book was made into a feature film).

Also, indicate if any of the author's publications appeared in multiple places. For instance, a fiction writer may publish a short story in a magazine and later include the same story in a collection of his or her own.

Example of an Author-Based Annotated Bibliography

The example below is from an annotated bibliography detailing contemporary author Kazuo Ishiguro's career (in MLA format).

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. Print.

Genre: Literary fiction

Publisher's synopsis: “*The Remains of the Day* is a compelling portrait of the perfect English butler and of his fading, insular world in postwar England. As the end of his three decades of service at Darlington Hall, Stevens embarks on a country drive, during which he looks back over his career to reassure himself that he has served humanity by serving as ‘a great gentleman’ But lurking in his memory are doubts about the true nature of Lord Darlington's greatness and greater doubts about his own faith in the man he served.”

Career significance: *The Remains of the Day* is widely considered Ishiguro's most successful novel. The 1993 movie version, starring Anthony Hopkins, received eight Academy Award nominations.

Awards: The novel won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1989.

Review: "Kazuo Ishiguro's tonal control of Stevens' repressive yet continually reverberating first-person voice is dazzling... It is remarkable, too, that as we read along in this strikingly original novel, we continue to think not only about the old butler, but about his country, its politics and its culture." (Graver, Lawrence. “What the Butler Saw.” *New York Times* 8 October 8 1989. Print.)

Excerpts: No excerpts from *The Remains of the Day* appeared in other publications.

Formatting reminder: Some professors will prefer you to present the information above as a single paragraph without headings.

Topic-Based

A topic-based annotated bibliography lists sources about a single subject or group of related subjects. This type of annotated bibliography usually includes multiple authors. As with the author-based model, each topic-based entry begins with properly formatted publication information and typically includes a summary.

Other categories may include the intended audience of the source, its relation to other available research on the topic, any pertinent credentials held by its author, special features of the source such as an index or glossary, whether the source represents a significant breakthrough in the research of a topic, any bias or limitations the source may have, the scope of the source, important questions it raises, or other specific information that informs the purpose of the annotated bibliography. For example, if the bibliography is about cosmetics testing on animals, a category about how each source addresses the ongoing ethical debate might be helpful.

Example of a Topic-Based Annotated Bibliography

The example below is from an annotated bibliography on the topic of evolution (in APA format).

Darwin, C. (1859). *On the Origin of Species*. London: John Murray.

Summary: *On the Origin of Species* presents evidence regarding the scientific theories of evolution and natural selection, including evidence gathered by Darwin on the famous 1830s Beagle expedition to the southern tropics and his subsequent findings.

Intended audience: *On the Origin of Species* was written for a general, nonscientific readership, and it enjoyed widespread popularity almost immediately upon its release.

Significant breakthrough: Generally considered Darwin's most important work, the book was one of the first publications to introduce the theory that organisms evolve over time through what he called "natural selection." His findings are now widely considered scientific fact. Mainly due to Darwin's work, evolution became an extremely popular scientific study and is now the centerpiece of research in the life sciences.

Controversy: Prior to publication, the topic of evolution was considered somewhat taboo in Darwin's native England. The country's scientific community was closely tied to the Church of England, which held that a higher power created each species in its current, unchanging form. The debate continues today, with some modern religions condemning evolution in favor of creationism.

Activity

To complete the following exercise, select any book from your bookshelf to answer each question and create an entry for a mock annotated bibliography. There are no “wrong” answers; the exercise will help you practice the strategies used in this kind of assignment. Each question should help you answer the next question.

1. If you were to use this book in a topic-based annotated bibliography, what would the overall topic of the bibliography be?

2. Write the basic publication information of the source in proper MLA or APA style:

3. Brainstorm at least five categories you could use to include in the annotation:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

4. In the space below, write one or two sentences under each of your categories. (You may have to research information such as awards or critical reception; make sure to give credit to the source of each piece of outside information.)

References

- “Annotated Bibliographies.” *OWL: Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue University, n.d. Web. 20 July 2012.
- “Write an Annotated Bibliography.” *University Library*. University of California Santa Cruz, 13 October 2010. Web. 1 August 2012.