

# CSU Learning Skills: *your link to success*

## Academic writing

### Writing an annotated bibliography

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Students are often required to prepare an annotated bibliography. *Annotate* means to 'make a note', and *biblio* refers to 'book'. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century students consult much more but still including books: e.g. websites, journals (hardcopy and electronic), newspapers and so on. Simply stated, an annotated bibliography is a list of sources or citations with a brief evaluative summary (annotation) about each source. Its purpose is to describe and evaluate the source text in a way that allows the reader to decide whether or not to read the work itself.

#### Terminology

<i>Source</i>	whatever material you have used for your topic; for example, journal articles, electronic sources, books or chapters of books
<i>Citation</i>	gives the precise bibliographical information needed to <i>locate</i> the material; it is the same as a list of references and is placed in alphabetical order
<i>Annotation</i>	follows each citation, and is a note that explains, describes and/or evaluates the cited source. Annotations are normally no more than 50 to 150 words

#### The purpose of an annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography is not a simple summary of each source text. Annotations are descriptive and critical, with the aim of informing the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources (books, journal articles, etc) cited. In general the annotation is to inform. Specific purposes may be to:

- review the literature on a particular subject
- illustrate the quality of your research
- provide examples of sources available
- describe other items on a topic that may be of interest to the reader
- explore the subject for further research.

#### How to write the annotation

1. Locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and documents that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic.
2. Cite the book, article or document, using the appropriate referencing style. At CSU this is usually the APA style. For example:  
Jones, B. (2008). *Colonial Paintings in NSW Art Galleries*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
3. State the authority or background of the author.
4. Comment on the intended audience and degree of reading difficulty.
5. Explain the main purpose of the text.

6. Identify the main points of the text.
7. Clarify the standpoint of the author in relation to his/her thesis or theme.
8. Explain how this text adds to a fuller understanding of your topic.
9. Add critical comment.
10. Point out any relation or comparisons to other texts in the bibliography.
11. Conclude with a summary comment.

Annotations usually do two things – describe and evaluate. Unless directed otherwise by your assignment task, write a concise (brief and clear) annotation that:

- summarises the item (e.g. journal article); this will be descriptive and objective;
- evaluates/critiques the source; this will be subjective;
- include one or more sentences that:
  - evaluate the authority or background of the author;
  - comment on the intended audience;
  - compare or contrast this work with another you have cited; or
  - explain how this work illuminates your bibliography topic.

Recall that you are writing an annotation – a brief account of a source – so write concisely. Do not write long, descriptive, or wordy sentences.

### **How to read the text**

1. Read actively; read critically.
2. Enter into a dialogue with the author.
3. Identify statements or conclusions where you might question the author's assertions, evidence or method.
4. Write an outline or draw a concept map to make a summary of the piece of writing.

Critical questions you will want to ask yourself when evaluating the source might include:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the source?
- What is the main argument and is it fully supported with evidence or examples?
- Is the source up-to-date?
- Is the subject dealt with fully and accurately, or is it treated superficially? Has the author omitted to deal with certain aspects of the topic? In other words: is it comprehensive?
- Is the source limited in any way - by time, place, sample size etc?
- Are there any special features? How is the source organised?
- What conclusions has the author made? Are they valid?
- Is the argument contentious or controversial? If yes, how does the author justify her stance and refute alternatives?
- How useful is the source? For whom?
- How is the source biased?
- Has the author adopted a particular theoretical perspective? Do implicit assumptions underlie the work?
- How credible is this source? Is this article from a highly respected professional journal or is it posted on the web by a narrow interest group?

## Example annotations

The following examples are taken from the websites listed below. The word count has been included to give you an idea of how it is possible to describe and evaluate a source in few words. You may need to refer to the list of critical questions above to assist you if you are required to write a longer annotation.

### Example 1 (62 words)

Hart, C.& A. Pilling. (1960). *The Tiwi of North Australia*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

This is the standard monograph on the Tiwi comprising the earlier work of Hart on the ceremonies, social organisation, economic system and daily life of this Aboriginal people, and the more recent description of the Tiwi in the 1960s by Pilling. It is particularly useful in providing an insight into the various forms of social control which operate in an island community.

*This annotation clarifies the scope of the work, comments on its value as a source and its place in the literature, and emphasises its particular relevance for this writer.*

### Example 2 (75 words)

Stoddart, W.S. (1972). *Art and Architecture in Medieval France*. New York: Harper & Row.

This text explores the history of Romanesque and Gothic art, with emphasis on the latter period. It is especially useful for its discussion of architectural techniques. Also included is an analysis of past scholarship of the periods, which was relevant to the question's focus on the interpretation of the word 'Romanesque'. However, much of the discussion is outdated, and its overview of the scholarship needed to be compared with the related material in Calkins.

*This annotation clarifies the scope of the book, its usefulness and relevance to the topic, and compares it with another source on the same topic.*

### Example 3 (12 words)

Stoddart, WS 1972, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France*, Harper & Row, New York.

A history of medieval art and architecture. An informative and useful book.

*This is a very poor annotation. Apart from not being in APA style it is too brief, not evaluative and simply repeats obvious information from the book's title.*

Note the use of first person in the next two examples. This is not common practice but some assignments may allow this.

### Example 4 (28 words)

Keefe, F.J. (1996). Pain in arthritis and musculoskeletal disorders. *Journal of Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy*, 2, 279-290.

I got all the facts about exercising with arthritis and the different types of exercise from this source. The author is very readable and includes a detailed bibliography.

*The expression would not be considered scholarly. The reviewer has however attempted to inform the reader of the content and relevance of the content to the task, and to evaluate the readability of the text and extent of supporting evidence. The annotation is however likely to be considered too short (28 words) for an academic assignment.*

**Example 5** (118 words)

Sewell, W. (1989). *Weaving a program: Literate programming in WEB*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Sewell explains the code language within these pages including certain lines of code as examples. One useful idea that Sewell uses is to explain characters and how they work in the programming of a Web Page. He also goes through and describes how to make lists and a title section. This will be very useful because all Web Pages have a title section. This author also introduces Pascal which I am not sure I will include in my manual but after I read more about it I can decide whether this will be helpful to future users. This book will not be the basis of my manual but will add some key points, which are described above.

*This is an informative annotation. Information is provided about the overall content of the source including special features. The annotation contains a description of the source but also an evaluation of the usefulness of the source to others and to the writer of the review.*

**Example 6** (110 words)

Goldschneider, F. K., Waite, L. J., & Witsberger, C. (1986). Non-family living and the erosion of traditional family orientations among young adults. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 541-554.

The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University, use data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men to test their hypothesis that non-family living by young adults alters their attitudes, values, plans, and expectations, moving them away from their belief in traditional sex roles. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males. Increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families. In contrast, an earlier study by Williams cited below shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of non-family living.

*This annotation also provides a comprehensive summary of the article and signals that the findings do not support the findings of an earlier study.*

**Additional web resources**

The following websites provide more detailed information and have been used as a basis for the writing of this guide. You can google other sites by typing 'annotated bibliography' as the search term, *but try to ensure the sites you use are reliable sites.*

Annotated Bibliographies: The OWL at Purdue University

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>

Annotated Bibliographies: UW-Madison Writing Centre

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/AnnotatedBibliography.html>

Annotated Bibliography: The Learning Centre, UNSW

[http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/annotated\\_bib.html](http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/onlib/annotated_bib.html)

Writing an annotated bibliography: Learning Connection, University of South Australia

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/ltu/students/study/referencing/bibliography.asp>