Annotated Bibliography

Purpose for Writing an Annotated Bibliography

The main purpose of an annotated bibliography is to demonstrate your research and analysis of sources. It can be an effective way to compare sources and record the development of your views about a topic. By summarizing and discussing the usefulness of a source for your paper, readers can also learn whether a source may be useful for their purposes as well.

Style and Formatting

Generally, an annotated bibliography consists of a list of sources with a paragraph (or more) written about each.

In the MLA style, according to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition, the work is titled Annotated Bibliography at the top, centered, the whole bibliography is double spaced with no extra spaces between paragraphs, and the works may be arranged alphabetically or grouped under headings depending on your purposes or assignment. Begin with a full bibliographic list entry for a source, formatted with the usual hanging indent. Then, continue from the end of the citation with a new sentence beginning your annotation.

An annotation typically summarizes a source in as little as a few sentences or as much as a paragraph. It goes on to present your evaluation of the source as it relates to your work in progress. You may explore any number of questions about your source. For example, will it be a useful source for you? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Does the source indicate a bias? If the source is useful, how will you use it in your research project? Has it changed the way you approach your argument? Your instructor is likely to give you guidelines for what to include in your annotations.

Officially, the American Psychological Association style does not use annotated bibliographies, but other online sources indicate one may format an APA-like annotated bibliography by starting the annotation on a separate line, which may or may not be indented another half-inch, and maintaining the margins of the hanging indent to keep the author’s name prominent in the bibliographic entry.
Example MLA Style Annotated Bibliography

Brown, Ophelia and Chu, Cynthia. “Do We Need an Excuse to Exist?” *Journal of Excuses and Existence, 4.2* (2011): 214-218. AcademicDoodahs. Web. 11 May 2012. The authors give an overview of their upcoming book that explores the history of one of humanity’s persistent questions, “Why are we here?” from the skeptical eye of those who wonder why we should even ask. For thousands of years, philosophers and clerics have pondered the origins of human existence and its purpose in the universe, writing closely-read texts that have led to religions, changes in language, and geopolitical conflict. Brown and Chu, professors of comparative religion at Spencer Davis University, approach the canonical texts of the ancients with a critical analysis of the purposes behind the question of our purpose. This article will help illustrate my discussion of the importance of analyzing the assumptions commonly made when philosophers establish their premises.

Example APA Style Annotated Bibliography


The authors give an overview of their upcoming book that explores the history of one of humanity’s persistent questions, “Why are we here?” from the skeptical eye of those who wonder why we should even ask. For thousands of years, philosophers and clerics have pondered the origins of human existence and its purpose in the universe, writing closely-read texts that have led to religions, changes in language, and geopolitical conflict. Brown and Chu, professors of comparative religion at Spencer Davis University, approach the canonical texts of the ancients with a critical analysis of the purposes behind the question of our purpose. This article will help illustrate my discussion of the
importance of analyzing the assumptions commonly made when philosophers establish their premises.


Two men in pith helmets face off on a lock and one of them comes to a very wet end. I won’t be using it for my paper; I just found it funny.

Bibliography (in MLA style)

“APA Annotated Bibliography (Haddad).” [Web search result.]


