Write an Annotated Bibliography
FOR APA, MLA, OR CHICAGO CITATION STYLE

What is an annotated bibliography?
- It is similar to a regular bibliography or References/Works Cited list. The difference is, in an annotated bibliography each citation or reference is followed by an annotation.

What is an annotation?
- A brief paragraph (50-200 words), usually after the citation, that describes and/or evaluates each source of information listed, usually within the context of a research assignment/specific topic.

Why should I do this?
- Annotations quickly inform the reader about the topic of an information source, as well as its relevance, accuracy, and quality.
- Creating an annotation helps to determine the usefulness of a source for an assignment, and shows you have applied critical thinking skills to search for and evaluate information sources.

How do I start?
- Find out the required citation style for your assignment (e.g., APA, MLA, or Chicago).
- Create your citations and References/Works Cited list. Unless otherwise advised, your annotated bibliography should be in alphabetical order by last name of the first author of each source.
- Find out the required annotation style – descriptive or evaluative?

Do I have to read the entire book / article / chapter?
- Not necessarily. Answers may be found in introductions/conclusions, book reviews, websites, first and last paragraphs, publisher’s information, abstracts, etc.

How to write an annotation:
The annotation should be brief (50-200 words).

Use the questions below as a guide to creating appropriate annotations:

Descriptive Annotations describe the content of a source without evaluating it. Consider:
- What is it? book, chapter, scholarly article, web page
- What is the source about? topics covered
- What is the purpose? introduction, commentary, research report
- Who is the intended audience? scholars, general public
- Who is/are the author(s)? journalists, researchers

Evaluative Annotations describe the content and assess its value as research in the field and in relation to your topic. Consider the above questions, plus:
- Why are the authors qualified to write about this topic? academic qualifications, research background
- Authority of the source? peer-reviewed journal, reputable publisher
- Are there any clear biases? personal or corporate agenda, unbalanced discussion
- What are the strengths of the work? thorough discussion, major work in the field
- What are the deficiencies or limitations of the work? research methods seem suspect, information is clearly missing
APA Descriptive Example

[APA citations are double-spaced.]

APA does not have specific guidelines for formatting an annotated bibliography; you may wish to consult your instructor.


Linda Johns is a Nova Scotia artist and creative non-fiction writer, and one of Johns’ previous books won the 1994 Edna Stebler Award for Creative Non-fiction. The book *For the birds: Nature notes from a woodland studio* is an entertaining non-fictional account of the inhabitants of the indoor bird sanctuary she has in her rural Nova Scotia home. This book’s purpose is to share insights about nature from a personal perspective, and is accessible and suitable for general readers.

MLA Evaluative Example

[MLA citations are double-spaced. The annotation directly follows the citation.]

Murray, Susan. “Reality television (U.S.).” *Encyclopedia of television*. Ed. Horace Newcomb. 2nd ed. Vol. 3. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004. 1900-1902. Print. Susan Murray, an Assistant Professor of Culture and Communication at New York University, is the author of this encyclopedia article. The article outlines a brief history of reality television in the United States. This work includes a short list of the types of programming deemed reality television and a few examples of early American reality TV programs. The encyclopedia is published with the support of the Museum of Broadcast Journalism, an institution housing major television archives. Murray’s particular article, while well-referenced, is limited in scope, focusing on American television. It does not deal with the issues of participant recruitment, psychological effects on past participants, nor the sustainability of the genre. This article could be a useful first resource for defining the topic of reality television. It would be of limited use to advanced researchers or those seeking information about the future of the genre or possible societal impacts.

Chicago Descriptive Example

[Chicago citations are single-spaced.]


This scholarly article by Paul Litt, currently a History and Canadian Studies professor at Carleton University, Ottawa, examines the brief period of “Trudeaumania.” The article focuses on Trudeau’s popularity as a cultural phenomenon rather than a political one, considering the unique cultural climate of the late 1960’s, and the skill with which Trudeau negotiated that climate. The essential role of media is also discussed in detail, as Trudeau simultaneously used, manipulated, and mocked the media formats which shaped and created his public image. Trudeau particularly appealed to the young urban media- and image-savvy middle class, and Trudeaumania exemplified the excitement generated amongst those ready for a more modern Canadian future. Although a scholarly article, it is quite readable for most interested in this period of Canadian political and cultural history.