Annotated Bibliographies

Introduction to an Annotated Bibliography

Many college courses and, especially, research projects will ask you to complete tasks that require reading multiple sources and synthesizing what you learn into a persuasive argument. Maybe you have experience reading academic genres and noticed that authors cite multiple sources throughout their work. How do writers know what sources to include, and how do writers choose specific information from these sources to create one cohesive argument? The answer is an annotated bibliography.

"Annotated bibliography" may sound intimidating, but in all likelihood, you have done at least half of the work before: creating a bibliography. The bibliography is simply the collection of works we find relevant to making and defending our argument. The annotation part is where many people can get lost. To annotate just means to make notes. So together, an annotated bibliography is a list of sources that have notes on each source.

Audience of an Annotated Bibliography

When it comes to any work of writing, the audience is your most important consideration. The fun thing about annotated bibliographies is they are for you! The point of this work is to keep your thoughts organized with their respective sources when you are working with multiple sources. Without an annotated bibliography, you're highly likely to forget what important information came from which source. You will also need to dig through sources again and again to find what you're looking for, and that can take hours.

When it comes to tone, annotated bibliographies can be quite informal since you are the one reading it. Just make sure that you write in a way that you can clearly follow in the future.

Content in an Annotated Bibliography

With an annotated bibliography, not only do you write the sources down in their citation style—saving you work when you write your final paper, you can write whatever you like underneath that citation. Keep in mind: while you don't need to write several pages of notes, make sure your notes in the annotated bibliography aren't too short. You need enough detail to remember the source in full. Here are some suggestions for content:

- Summarize the source in your own words—Avoid quoting at this stage, and include page numbers for any important main points.

- List important quotes if you have them—make sure to include the page number.
  - Summarize why each quote is important.
- Answer: How do the main points of this source relate to the other sources?
  - Are there several sources agreeing on the same main points?
  - Are there similarities with key differences?
  - Are there significant differences?
- Answer: Do you agree or disagree with this source? Why or why not?
- Answer: Do you have any further questions after reading the source?
- Answer: How does this source further support your research?

Structure of an Annotated Bibliography

Once you have a source and all of your thoughts on it, what should it look like? Check out the example below:

Raycroft, J. (2018). Dilemmas of Representation in Contemporary Environmental Anthropology: Documenting Dynamite Fishing in Southeastern Tanzania, *Ethnobiology Letters* 9(2): 289-298.

In this article, Raycroft uses a series of "ethnographic vignettes"—a collection of ethnographic case studies from other articles of research—to better understand how ethnographers engage with communities during their work (289). This specifically relates to ethnographies in environmental anthropology, in which diverse cultures are largely studied by members outside of the communities. This causes Raycroft to use these case studies as a critically reflexive exercise to see his own contribution of practice in cultures not his own.

This article ties in well with the Wyndham (2009) article in that both authors are acutely aware of the positionality ethnographers carry with them when they venture into cultural/social spaces that are not their own (290).

Notice the general structure given above:

- Full citation in the appropriate style (here it's APA)
- Detailed summary of the source with tie-ins to works outside of the source—notice the personalized comments about the subject matter.

Software for an Annotated Bibliography

Adding to the flexibility of an annotated bibliography, you can certainly write and store your citations and notes in Word or Google Docs; however, that can be time consuming, and you may forget to add in some important citation details. To make things a little easier, there is software that help you to gather all the citation data while including a space for you to make notes. Here are some programs:

- Zotero
- RefWorks
- Endnote
- EasyBib

Each of these programs has their own pros and cons, and much of what people prefer comes down to personal needs and experience with the user interface. Try these out to see which one you like best! Keep in mind that UNT already has a RefWorks account set up for you, and you can keep it after you graduate, leaving you with all of the sources from your academic career. For a full introduction to RefWorks, check out the Library guide: https://Guides.Library.unt.edu/rwnew.

For more information about annotated bibliographies, or to work on your own annotated bibliography, set an appointment with a Writing Center tutor today using our contact information, located in the footer of this handout.