How Do I Create an Annotated Bibliography?

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

A bibliography is a list of sources (generally books, articles, or websites) that you use in your paper. In an annotated bibliography, each source is followed by a short summary that describes the source and explains its relevance to your paper topic. Creating an annotated bibliography ensures that you read your sources with care and have a good sense of how they relate to your topic.

Before You Begin

Before you can create your annotated bibliography you need to gather relevant sources. Read your assignment sheet carefully. Consider any requirements for the types of sources you need to find:

- How many sources do you need?
- Do you need to find a certain number of books and a certain number of articles?
- Do you need to find scholarly sources, or can you use popular magazines and newspapers?

You also need to consider the topic or question that you are researching. What kinds of information do you need in order to write a paper on your topic? Does your topic need to be narrowed? For more information on developing a topic see the Academic Skills Centre’s “Developing a Topic and Thesis Statement.”

You need good research skills in order to find the sources for your annotated bibliography. There are many indexes that you can use to identify books and articles on your topic. For information and help with locating sources, go to the Library Subject Guide for your course or check out the Library Skills Tutorials.

Reading Your Sources Critically

Once you have located your sources, you need to read and consider them critically. Keep in mind that you do not need to read every word of every source. Instead, focus on the argument and evidence presented in the book or article: What topic or question is the work responding to? What is its thesis? How is it organized and what types of evidence does it draw on? Also, consider how the source relates to your topic: How might you use this source in your paper? Does it support or contradict your tentative thesis? How does it compare to other sources that you have read on your topic?

For further guidance on reading academic sources, consult the Academic Skills Centre’s “Reading Critically and Efficiently: Strategies for Study.”

Format of the Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography includes the full publication information for each source as well as a short, paragraph summary of what the source says.

- Each source is listed in correct bibliographic form. The form that you use depends on the course or discipline
that you are in. For example, in history courses, you
would create bibliographic entries according to Chicago
style. For Politics, you would likely follow MLA style.
For a complete listing of the referencing preferences of
Trent departments, see the Academic Skills Centre’s
Documentation Guide.

- Sources are listed in alphabetical order by the author’s
  last name.
- Each source is followed by a 3-5 sentence summary
  that is written in paragraph form.

**What to Include in the Summary**

Your summary of each source should include the following
information:

- For some disciplines, you should include a brief
  explanation that establishes the author’s expertise. For
  example, you can mention where the author works and
  his or her professional title. This information is usually
  listed on the title page of articles or on the dust jacket of
  books.
- a sentence or two on the general topic or research
  question that the work addresses
- a sentence or two on the thesis or argument of the work
- a sentence on the author’s methodology. For example:
  What kinds of sources are used? Is it a case study or an
  overview of scholarship on the subject? How is the
  book/article organized?
- a sentence on how this source is relevant to your paper,
  how it will help your research and analysis, or how it
  compares to other scholarship on the topic

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**Sample Entry Using Chicago Bibliographic Style**

Nicholson, Helen. “Women on the Third Crusade.” *Journal of

In this article, Nicholson, a Reader in History at
Cardiff University, explores the controversial question
of whether, and to what extent, women participated in
armed conflict during the Third Crusade. After reviewing
different historians’ views on the issue, she examines the
widely different depictions of women’s participation in the crusade given in Muslim
and Christian accounts. Nicholson exposes the biases
within both Muslim and Christian accounts to examine
how Muslim sources tended to exaggerate women’s
participation in armed conflict while Christian sources
tended to conceal women’s roles. Ultimately, she
argues that while women played many important
support roles during the Crusades, their participation
in armed conflict was limited to extremely dire battles
The previous two sentences explain the thesis of the article. This article will be essential to my paper
in that it provides an excellent overview of the primary
and secondary sources associated with the debate over
women in the Crusades; it will help to support my
argument that, while they were essential to the
Crusades, women were limited in the roles that they
could play within them due to social stigma. This sentence explains how the article will be relevant to the
essay topic and argument.
Sample Entry Using MLA Referencing Style


In this article, Chappell, a professor at California State Fullerton, examines the innovative form of child heroism that Rowling develops through the character of Harry Potter [*This sentence introduces the author and general topic*]. Contrasting Harry with traditional child-heroes such as Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* and Oliver Twist, Rowling argues that Potter is a new, postmodern hero in that he encounters good and evil and right and wrong as ambiguous continuums instead of clear binaries. Rather than accepting adult authority, Harry must constantly question whether authorities are acting for good or for evil and find ways to enrich his powers beyond what is sanctioned by the adult world [*The previous 2 sentences contain the thesis statement*]. Chappell’s work spans all of the books from the Harry Potter series as she develops her argument by examining several “trajectories” including: freedom and control, institutions and injustice, rule compliance, and defiance [*This sentence explains how Chappell develops his arguments*]. This article will be important to my paper in that it offers insight into the complex and ambiguous relationship between good and evil in the books, a relationship that will be central to my discussion of the characters of Potter and Snape [*This sentence explains the relevance of the source to the essay topic and argument*].