

Common Genre Guide: Annotated Bibliographies

What is the purpose of an annotated bibliography?

Instructors typically use annotated bibliographies as a tool to scaffold the research process. Doing an annotated bibliography requires that students read and respond to a body of literature relevant to a topic or research question (approx. 3-8 sources is probably typical). By completing the annotated bibliography, students should be better prepared to organize and compose longer essays that integrate research.

Sometimes, however, an instructor may use an annotated bibliography as an end in itself (rather than as a step in writing a longer paper). In this case, the purpose leans more toward ensuring that students have read and understand a body of research relevant to a topic or research question.

What should I include in my annotated bibliography?

Each annotation typically has four parts:

- **The citation:** The citation begins each entry. The bibliography as whole should be organized in alphabetical order according to the start of each citation. Check to see if your instructor wants you to use APA, MLA, or another citation style.
- **Summary of the source:** In a couple of sentences, you should be able to encapsulate the main argument of the source, and highlight the most important evidence used to support that argument. Alternatively, if the source is an article reporting experimental findings, you should summarize the purpose of the study (what the authors hoped to learn), the hypothesis(es), and the main findings. If you can concisely work in information that relates to the methodology, theoretical framework, and/or implications of the research, even better!
- **Analysis of the source:** This is your opportunity to take a stance in relation to the source in just a few sentences. What do you think it did really well, or perhaps not so well? What did you find especially interesting or surprising about the source? Does the source have any obvious limitations?
- **Application of the source:** At the end of your entry, explain how you plan to use this source in your project/paper. Tell your reader why the source is relevant and useful to you. You can use sentence starters like, "This source provides....that I will use to..." OR "This source is especially useful, because..." You can also highlight how this source fits in with the other sources in your bibliography (e.g. Is it really similar to other sources? Or does it stand out as providing a distinctive perspective?)

Caveat: Keep in mind that the parts listed above are a typical scheme for an annotated bibliography. But instructors vary in exactly what they are looking for. Be sure to read the prompt carefully to figure out if all of these parts are required.

What does an annotated bibliography look like?

You can see a sample annotated bibliography entry at the end of this document. It's probably a little long – your entries may not need to be so thorough. Keep in mind the suggested word counts or number of sentences suggested by your instructor.

How long should my entries be?

Check the directions from your instructor first. However, a solid annotation will likely be 5 or more sentences. Consider writing 1-3 sentences of summary, 1-2 sentences of analysis, and 1 sentence of application. Each annotation should appear to be a substantive paragraph in between your citations.

What are some tips for writing an annotated bibliography?

Use your own words!! Don't just rely on the abstract or the first page of the source. Instead, understand your source well as a whole and practice explaining it to a friend, roommate, or notecard. Try setting the source aside and don't look at it while writing your summary.

In addition, **think creatively** about how you can use a wide range of source for different purposes. Not every source needs to provide support for the same idea. Instead, they might have different perspectives or emphases, or provide useful data, or even make an argument that you will refute!

For more information, check out this guide from Holy Spirit Library:

<https://cabrini.libguides.com/annotatedbibliography>

References

*To create this guide, the author consulted previous materials prepared by the Writing Center that drew from sources on summary and analysis for the purpose of writing literature reviews. For further reading, you may want to consult the following:

Galvan, J. L. (2014). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences* (6th ed.). Routledge.

Penn State Graduate Writing Center. (2018). *Writing literature reviews*.

<https://gwc.psu.edu/files/2016/12/Literature-Review-Packet-Summer-2018-14ngdgc.pdf>

Annotated Bibliography Sample

[Part 1: The Citation, APA Style]

Jozkowski, K. N., Peterson, Z. D., Sanders, S. A., Dennis, B., & Reece, M. (2014). Gender differences in heterosexual college students' conceptualizations and indicators of sexual consent: Implications for contemporary sexual assault prevention education. *Journal of Sex Research, 51*(8), 904-916. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2013.792326>

[Part 2: SUMMARY, 5 sentences.] The aim of this research study was to learn more about how college students define, communicate, and interpret sexual consent and non-consent, and to analyze potential gender differences in those actions, **so as to inform** sexual assault prevention education. **The results of the research study**, which surveyed a convenience sample of 185 college students at one Midwestern university, **supported the hypotheses that** women and men would hold the same general beliefs about what constitutes sexual consent, and that verbal cues of consent would increase as the intimacy of the sexual interaction increased. However, in contrast to their prediction, Jozkowski et al found that, overall, both women and men indicated they were more likely to *express* consent verbally rather than nonverbally. But when it came to *interpreting* the consent or non-consent of their partners, both women and men indicated they would rely more on nonverbal cues. **These results suggest** a disconnect between what college students say *they* do when it comes to communicating consent, and “what they say *their partner* does” (p. 912).

[Part 3: ANALYSIS, 3 sentences.] This scholarly essay appears well researched with a valid methodology. I believe **one important strength** is how the authors frame gendered sexual communication through the idea of “sexual scripts,” or accepted cultural narratives for how

sexual interactions traditionally progress between heterosexual partners. This framing highlights one of the challenges of contemporary sexual assault prevention education—that it promotes communication patterns that may go against traditional ideas of how men and women are supposed to behave in sexual interactions. **[Part 4: APPLICATION, 2 sentences.] I will use this essay in my project to show** that college men and women actually share common conceptualizations of sexual consent. These findings may end up challenging my hypothesis that college women are more likely than college men to conceptualize sexual consent as an explicit verbal expression.