# How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

## What is an annotated bib?

A bibliography usually just includes the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.). An annotated bibliography includes the correctly-formatted citation, and then in a short paragraph: a summary, an evaluation of its quality, and a reflection on its usefulness for your research.

## Why do I need to bother with this?

Writing an annotated bib will help you to:

- **Learn about your topic**: Writing an annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for a research project. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you have to write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully and evaluate it both for its authority and usefulness for your research. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information.

- **Formulate a thesis**: Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and then are able to develop your own point of view.

## How do I write them and what do I need to include?

The citation itself is written in standard MLA format. Guidelines are available in your planner on p. 19-22 or on the library webpage. The annotations for each source are written in short paragraph form. The annotations include the following three parts:

**Summarize**: Provide an overview of what the source is about.
- What is the point of this book or article?
- Who is the intended audience? (purpose of the work)
- Scope and purpose of the work: Is it an overview, persuasive, editorial?

**Evaluate**: Determine the source’s origin.
- Evaluation of research: Is the work logical, clear, and well researched?
- Author's credentials and evaluation of author bias (check biographical/online sources for author info)
- Comparison of the work with others on the same topic or others in your bibliography

**Reflect on its Usefulness**: How does this source balance out your research?
- Was this source helpful to you? Highlight its value and limitations.
- How does it help you shape your argument?
- Has it changed how you think about your topic?

The following examples illustrate what an annotated bibliography may look like. Note how the annotations summarize and evaluate the resources, while stating the usefulness to the researcher.


This site gives an overview of the variety of inhalants, their effects on the body, consequences and treatment. This government site is thorough and used many well-known sources for its information. A limitation is that it is from the government, whose objective is to fight drug use for political reasons. I included the street terms listed for inhalants, as well as the 2002 statistics of inhalant use among high school students in my research. I also used two of the statistics tables for my presentation.


This book provides a general overview of PCP as a drug, its use, its effects, and the fight against it. Although the author isn’t a specialist in the field, he is a well-known journalist so he most-likely performed quality research and used credible sources. A limitation is that I’ll need to include other authors in my bibliography, who are actually experts in the field of drug research. I used this book heavily as a source of up-to-date statistics since it just came out this year.

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