The Annotated Bibliography with Examples

Definitions

A bibliography is a list of citations of sources (books, articles, documents, websites, etc.). In academic writing, we cite the sources we end up using in our work on a “Works Cited” page (MLA) or “References” page (APA).

An annotation is a brief (often about 150 words) paragraph that both describes and evaluates the source. The purpose is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited. More importantly, the annotation serves as an important tool in research; it helps guide our writing decisions as we draft our work. Annotating also helps us organize our materials.

Anatomy of Annotation

An annotated bibliography summarizes the central theme and scope of each source in the list but also provides the writer’s assessment of how the source can be useful. Thus, conceptualize your annotated bib as Description + Summary + Evaluation.

Each annotation should include the following:

- CITATION: a complete citation for each work included.
- DESCRIPTION: the type of source
- SUMMARY: a sentence or two summarizing the author’s main point.
- EVALUATION: a short evaluation of the authority of the author to write about the topic, quality of the source, objectivity, etc. PLUS your own thoughts on why this is relevant for you in the context of your research paper and how you will use this source. Will it serve as background information? Possible support for a main point in your argument? A point of opposition?

Tips

- Don't confuse abstracts or summaries with annotations. Annotations include a summary, yes, but the summary is only part of the annotation. Remember, annotation means description (name the source type), summary (a description of the main points), and an evaluation (how the source will be used).
- Abstracts are the purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes. An abstract will tell you what the article is about, but it won’t help you with the evaluation. The evaluation is for you, the writer, to create.
- Annotations are descriptive and critical; they expose the author's point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority.

In this *editorial from a scholarly journal*, Finneran questions why many people on both sides in the debate over the safety of genetically engineered food base their arguments on speculation, rumor, and emotion rather than scientific research. He references an article by Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin. Lewontin discusses an anti-genetic engineering physicist whose arguments are based on Hindu scripture instead of lab results and pro-genetic engineering scientists who advertise "Golden Rice" (a genetically engineered variety of rice rich in beta carotene) as a benefit for victims of malnutrition who lack vitamin A, even though many people suffering from malnutrition are too weak to properly metabolize the beta carotene into vitamin A.

Kevin Finneran is editor-in-chief of *Issues in Science and Technology*, a policy journal sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the University of Texas at Dallas, making him someone qualified to write about forming opinions on scientific matters.

This editorial serves as a cautionary reminder that sensible decisions on important issues must be grounded in fact and not influenced by vague fears, unrelated beliefs, unwarranted enthusiasm, or knee-jerk emotional reactions. *My study* will discuss the pro's and con's of genetically modified foods, so I will use this article to better understand the types of arguments used in the debate. This article is also useful to me because it contains several other relevant ideas I can pursue. For example, I will read the article by Lewontin mentioned in this editorial, and look for more information about “golden rice.”
In this book, Donaldson examines the state of the mental healthcare facilities from the point of view of a former psychiatric patient who spent considerable time in such an institution. He describes what it feels like to be clinically insane and how he was treated by both doctors and nurses as well as by society. This is a reliable source because the author tells about his experiences based on first-hand experience, but it’s possible that to prove his point about the poor treatment of the mentally ill he might exaggerate some of his stories. My topic is mental health illness in the early 20th century and how that ties in to Willy Loman’s experiences in A Death of a Salesman. I will use this source to compare Donaldson to Loman and gauge how the latter must have been dealing with his condition. This source ties in well into my paper since I examine how the mentally ill were treated in this time period and how that affected Willy Loman.