

What is an Annotated Bibliography?

The Annotated Bibliography is essentially an organized system for taking notes. But organized according to what factors? So glad you asked. Here's the standard definition, snipped from Dictionary.com

annotated bibliography

noun

a bibliography that includes brief explanations or notes for each reference

Examples

An annotated bibliography helps the researcher determine which sources are relevant to a line of inquiry.

This definition lacks two critical pieces of information: 1) how does the writer decide which notes to take or which explanations to write? 2) what makes a source relevant? furthermore, why would a writer take the time to write an annotated bib entry as a means of determining relevancy? wouldn't the researcher make that determination first? (the answer to this question is YES -- for more information on organizing searching, see the FFSP page). [create page for find, filter, select, prioritize]

To address the 2 questions above, I would like you to think about the AB not merely as a compilation of sources with notes, but as a road map to the literature pertinent to a project. No working researcher spends his/her precious and limited time just reading and writing summaries of papers. Instead, the read opportunistically [5 step reading process], which is to say, with a purpose in mind. This is not as easy as it sounds because accurate opportunistic reading requires both objective understanding and subjective assessment. These are the skills this kind of annotated bibliography are intended to develop.

Action Plan

- Begin with literature you've already deemed relevant [see reading and FFSP]
- For each article, follow the 5 step reading process
 - Topic, Gap, RQ
 - Skim Methods
 - Skim Results (esp. figures)
 - Read 1st paragraph of Discussion (maybe first 2)
 - Write a summary of what you just read IN YOUR OWN WORDS
- If you are writing about this topic for the first time, then go back and read the article twice
 - first, read "lightly" -- not for deep understanding, but for the next level of understanding following the 5 step process -- not as shallow as skimming -- instead, reading lightly is like looking over a new landscape before you walk it --

take in the terrain, note where movement is likely to be difficult or take extra effort, visualize the path in your head.

- as you read lightly, mark the spots in the text that you find particularly relevant to your project
- second, read deeply, for understanding, especially of those sections you marked during the previous steps, paying special attention to the context in which that information appears to minimize misinterpretation
 - Ps -- don't EVER read only the abstract -- it's not usually interpreted accurately -- that is, it may be written accurately, but when encountered as a stand-alone text (like when you read only the abstract), the results seem overly robust because none of the nuance in the Discussion section or variation in Results makes it into the Abstract
- Write the Annotated Bib Entry with these four parts
 - Source reference in correct style (APA, AMA, IEEE, etc.)
 - Summary of the article in your own words -- it's okay for your understanding about research to evolve so do NOT copy from the article for this step -- really, just write the basic "topic + RQ + Method + Results + Conclusion" that you crafted after the 5 step process
 - do NOT include any evaluation in this step -- this is the information that needs to be cited and evaluation or bias words should not be included
 - if the authors use them, then be sure to put them in quotes
 - Bulleted list of project-specific key ideas -- If there are key ideas or figures, list them -- include page numbers, and if you quote, include quotations marks
 - This list is the most important info from the article for a particular project -- this is the stuff you are likely to synthesize, refer to, incorporate, etc.
 - DO NOT COPY AND PASTE -- avoid plagiarism by keeping this information in your "own words" by capturing the key, relevant information in an abbreviated form. When you write from this list, you will do so in your own "voice", and therefore, write original prose.
 - Evaluation of value for a project -- in this step, you make specific comments to yourself about why this article is valuable, where in the paper the info might be used
 - place this section in brackets or mark it in some way -- you don't want to confuse this section with the summary information when you're writing at 2:00 a.m.

Examples [annotate parts and explain briefly how AB related to a particular project]

Important Tips

- Begin your AB early -- this is not something useful to you if you've procrastinated. You can't write an AB at the same time you're writing a paper! For the info to be useful, work on it steadily for the entire length of a project

- If you're having problems with writing the summaries in your own words, then use bulleted lists instead. This strategy can alleviate the urge to copy/paste/plagiarize.
- Know your citation style and use it throughout. If you have software to help, by all means use it!
 - Mendeley
 - Refworks
 - EndNote

Scheduling Basics

- Searching the literature is a separate task from writing the ann bib. Schedule a day or two just for searching and finding articles. If you get frustrated, go talk to a librarian -- GET EXPERT HELP! It is a waste of your time and soul to wallow hours in search-results-wasteland when 15 minutes with an expert can help you refine your search and get results.
 - If you are not majoring in this field, then definitely talk to a librarian -- crudely put, you don't need to know how to find sources in this field for a lifetime, so let someone help you with this.
 - If you are majoring in this field, then DEFINITELY talk to a specialist librarian! You need to learn how to search in this field and an expert guide will send you in the right direction from the beginning.
- Plan for at least one article per day -- you can do more, especially after you've become familiar with a topic, but at the beginning, an article a day is a good pace that leaves mental space for remembering the information
 - This implies that if a paper requires 10 sources, you should schedule 10 days for the AB. Each day will include some reading and writing, but also time for more searching!
- At around the fifth article, comparisons among the articles should begin to emerge. If this doesn't happen, then go back and re-read your entries. If your search keywords and perspective are well-represented by the articles you chose, you should start seeing connections between them -- definitions of key terms should sound similar, arguments about concepts should cohere, disagreements might pop up. If you aren't having this intellectual experience, then re-examine your keywords search and the POV you're searching -- if it isn't tight enough, then the article will seem scattered and disconnected. You need to work on refining the idea.