Annotated Bibliography

# Definition

An annotated bibliography is a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources that are being referenced or cited in the project or paper. After properly citing the source according to the format assigned by the instructor (MLA, APA, CMS), the annotation follows in paragraph form. The length of the annotation depends on the purpose of the source being used as well as the guidelines for the bibliography, as set by the instructor. General summaries of each source may be several lines in length while an in-depth analysis of each source may require lengthier paragraphs.

# 3 Steps to Writing an Annotation

1. **Summarize:** Depending on the amount of detail that is being summarized, this can be a few sentences paraphrasing the source or a more lengthy description. Questions to ask when summarizing the source include: What are the main arguments? What is the point of this source? If someone asked what this source is about, what would my response be?

2. **Assess:** Following a summary of the source, it can sometimes be helpful to write a few sentences evaluating the necessity of the source for the paper or project. When evaluating a source, some questions to consider are: Is the information reliable? Is the source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?

3. **Reflect:** Once the source has been summarized and assessed, it can be helpful to consider how the source fits into the scope of the project or paper. Questions to consider in a reflection include: How does the source help to shape the argument? How will the source be used within the paper or project? Has the source changed how you think about the topic?

The annotations in the bibliography may include some of these steps, all of these, or others, depending on the guidelines from the instructor. By considering each source through summary, assessment, and evaluation, you are forced to read each source more carefully and consider the information from a more critical standpoint, as opposed to just collecting information. Writing an annotated bibliography can also help you to understand what is being said about your chosen topic such as the current issues and what people are arguing about which will, in turn, help you to develop and communicate your own point of view.

When evaluating a source, always remember to keep the thesis of the project or paper in mind. Each source used should provide evidence and/or support for the thesis statement, or main idea, of the paper. Consider the value of the source to your thesis statement when writing an assessment in your annotation.

# Examples

## **Annotation with Summary**

Davidson, Hilda Ellis. Roles of the Northern Goddess. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Davidson's book provides a thorough examination of the major roles filled by the numerous pagan goddesses of Northern Europe in everyday life, including their roles in hunting, agriculture, domestic arts like weaving, the household, and death. The author discusses relevant archaeological evidence, patterns of symbol and ritual, and previous research. The book includes a number of black and white photographs of relevant artifacts.

## **Annotation with Summary, Assessment, and Reflection**

Lamott, Anne. Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life. New York: Anchor Books, 1995. Print.

Lamott's book offers honest advice on the nature of a writing life, complete with its insecurities and failures. Taking a humorous approach to the realities of being a writer, the chapters in Lamott's book are wry and anecdotal and offer advice on everything from plot development to jealousy, from perfectionism to struggling with one's own internal critic. In the process, Lamott includes writing exercises designed to be both productive and fun.

Lamott offers sane advice for those struggling with the anxieties of writing, but her main project seems to be offering the reader a reality check regarding writing, publishing, and struggling with one's own imperfect humanity in the process. Rather than a practical handbook to producing and/or publishing, this text is indispensable because of its honest perspective, its down-to-earth humor, and its encouraging approach.

Chapters in this text could easily be included in the curriculum for a writing class. Several of the chapters in Part 1 address the writing process and would serve to generate discussion on students' own drafting and revising processes. Some of the writing exercises would also be appropriate for generating classroom writing exercises. Students should find Lamott's style both engaging and enjoyable.