Guidelines for Annotated Bibliographies

Why should I write an annotated bibliography?

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 must read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information. At the professional level, annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been done in the literature and where your own research or scholarship can fit. To help you formulate a thesis: every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis; 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 you'll then be able to develop your own point of view, entering the conversation with your project.

To help other researchers: Scholarly annotated bibliographies are sometimes published. They provide a comprehensive overview of everything important that has been and is being said about that topic. You may not ever get your annotated bibliography published, but as a researcher, you might want to look for one that has been published about your topic.

What is an annotated bibliography?

Definitions: A **bibliography** is a list of sources (books, journals, websites, periodicals, etc.) used for researching a topic. Bibliographies are sometimes called "references" or "works cited" depending on the style format you are using. A bibliography usually just includes the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, rifle, publisher, etc.).

An **annotation** is a summary and brief evaluation of the value of an individual source.

So, an **annotated bibliography** includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources (alphabetically listed). Depending on your project or the assignment, your annotations may do one or more of the following:

> **Summarize**: Some annotations merely summarize the source. What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say? The length of your annotations will determine how detailed your summary is.

> **Assess**: After summarizing a source, it may be helpful to evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?

Reflect: Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?

Format: The format of an annotated bibliography can vary, so ask for specific guidelines and request a sample from your professors. (See sample bibliography, attached.)

The bibliographic information: Bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in either APA or MLA format.

The annotations: Annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary from several sentences to a page, depending on your aims. A few sentences of general summary followed by several sentences of how the work fits into your project serves you well when you begin to draft.

Paraphrase: Write it in Your Own Words: Paraphrasing is one way to use a text in your own writing without directly quoting source material. Anytime you are taking information from a source that is not your own, you need to specify where you got that information.

A paraphrase is...

- Your own version of essential information and ideas expressed by someone else,   presented in a new form.
- One way (when accompanied by accurate documentation) to borrow from a source.
- A more detailed restatement than a summary, which focuses on a single main idea.

Paraphrasing is a valuable skill because...

- It is better than quoting information from an unremarkable passage.
- It helps you control the temptation to quote too much.
- The mental process required for successful paraphrasing helps you grasp the full meaning of the original.

6 Steps to Effective Paraphrasing

1. Reread the original passage until you understand its frill meaning.
2. Set the original aside and write out your paraphrase.
3. Jot down a few words below your paraphrase to remind you later how you envision using this material. At the top, write a key word to indicate the subject.
4. Check your rendition with the original to make sure that your version accurately expresses all the essential information in a new form.
5. Use quotation marks to identify any unique term or phrase you borrowed exactly from the source (and then cite in parentheses).
6. Record the source (including the page) so that you can credit it easily if you decide to use the material in your paper.

Sample Annotated Bibliography on Charter Schools

General Thesis of Paper: Based on four criteria--equality, evaluation, efficiency, and excellence—I'll argue that school vouchers do not suffice as a viable option to America's failing schools, because privatizing education through such programs fails to solve problems already existing in public schools; instead, they further aggravate the problems.

House, Ernest R. Schools for $ale. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998.

> House's book is directed at policymakers and the general public concerned about educational issues in America. The author believes that educational policy is in part decided on by policymakers who connect it with national economic concerns, and many times educational policies fail because of this. The book is a critique of American educational policy over the past 20 years and how education and economic progress have come to be associated by policymakers. Additionally, privatization of education and school vouchers are argued as not being feasible, at least from the author's perspective. This is biased source, but a good source in the sense that it deals specifically with economic and educational policies and makes a case against free market policies for improving America's schools. The evidence provided by the author in this book will be quite useful and specific when discussing the economic aspect of privatization and school vouchers.

Kemerer, Frank R. "The Legal Status of Privatization and Vouchers." Levin 39-71.

Levin, Henry M., ed. "Studying Privatization in Education." Privatizing Education. Boulder: Westview Press, 2001.

> This is a book for those interested in the privatization of education and for those studying the field and demand research. The book is about the privatization of education, who the stakeholders are in the privatization, how the poor play into the school vouchers issue, and how school vouchers should be evaluated. Different chapters of the book are written by certain authors with respect to the many questions being raised about whether the marketplace can offer better schooling. There appears to be a wide variety of perspectives on the issue of privatization within the book, and it is a good source to determine who the stakeholders are and who benefits from privatization.

Lowe, Robert. "The Perils of School Vouchers," Rethinking Schools — An Agenda for Change. Ed. David Levine, et al. New York: The New York Press, 1995.

> This is an article from a book that focuses on education reform and more specifically school vouchers. The book is intended for the general public and for those who are concerned about educational reform issues. The article is a critique of school vouchers and the author believes vouchers will not bring excellence or equity to America's schools. Some history surrounding voucher programs and arguments against school vouchers are provided. This is a biased article that provides good information on why vouchers do not lead to equality and excellence, but in fact, quite the opposite.

Myers, David E. "Criteria for Evaluating School Voucher Studies." Levin 303-316.

Natriello, Gary. "Vouchers, Privatization, and the Poor." Levin 263-277.

Schneider, Mark. "Information and Choice in Educational Privatization." Levin 72-102.

Weil, Danny. School Vouchers and Privatization. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2002.

> This reference handbook (from a series of Contemporary Education Issues examines the privatization of education and, more specifically, private choice, school vouchers, and other private reform efforts. Intended for those interested in the issue of privatization and school vouchers, the book also advances further research by exploring the controversies, arguments, history, research, and conclusions surrounding the privatization of education. A context surrounding arguments for or against privatization of education and associated reform efforts is provided, and there appears to be no bias in the format. Well's text provides a strong source that presents both sides of the issue and offers considerable scope for thinking through the issue more generally. In particular, evidence from the reference handbook is most helpful.

Yglesias, Matthew. "The Verdict on Vouchers," American Prospect. February 2004: 51-53.

> This is a news article for the general public and for those interested in school voucher studies about whether vouchers are worth the effort. The article describes a study funded by the right and completed by a Harvard professor that tried to prove whether or not school vouchers were successful in certain areas in which they had been implemented. The study does not conclusively prove that school vouchers are successful and test scores did not add up to expected levels. The author appears to be biased against scientific methods to debate school vouchers, but rather in favor of having an ideological debate over the role of public institutions in civic life. The overall conclusion from the study and from the author's opinion is that privatization of schools through the market does not improve academic achievement. This is a good source because it discusses an actual study and contains some recent evidence of school vouchers' effectiveness, or lack thereof

Annotated Bibliography
Evaluation Sheet

Components	Excellent 8-10 points	Good 5-7 points	Incomplete/ Unacceptable 4-1 points
Statement of organization interest and/or context provided _____ **Five points**	*Present 5 points* *Not present 0 points*		
Selection of sources _____**points**	(a) Balance of sources. (b) Range of sources (i.e., variety, articles, papers etc. and variety of authors).	(a) Sources somewhat balanced. (b) Some range of sources and authors.	(a) Sources not balanced only focused on one type. (b) Too many from similar source (e.g., used articles published in one journal or) or author. (c) number of entries makes it difficult to tell
Focus of annotated bibliography _____**points**	The fit between the context/topic and the readings is excellent.	Relevance is adequate and literature generally fits the context/topic.	(a) Relevance to research topic/context is unclear. (b) Readings don't make sense in terms of the context/topic. (c) number of entries makes it difficult to tell
Presentation of annotated bibliography _____ **points**	(a) Points addressed succinctly. (b) eight annotations.	(a) Most follow suggested format and present key points with the addition of other information. (b) seven to five annotations	(a) Articles not summarized using guidelines. (b) Excessive details given. (c) four – 1 annotations
Citations _____**points**	MLA or APA style format correctly applied.	Few consistent errors in citations (MLA or APA).	MLA or APA not carefully followed.
Grammar syntax, and Mechanics _____ *Points (four points possible)*	(a) Proofread for spelling (b) Proofread for mechanics, grammar and syntax (c) Pages numbered (d) Document assembled and stapled		