



# **Annotated Bibliographies**

## **A-State Online Writing Center**

### What is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations followed by a brief paragraph (150-300 words) that describes and evaluates each source. Annotations are descriptive and critical, as they expose the author's point of view, clarity, and authority.

### Why do we write annotated bibliographies?

Scholars sometimes publish annotated bibliographies to help researchers decide what sources are worth reading in more detail. These short paragraphs help readers find the significance, accuracy, and quality of the sources.

### Before writing your annotations

#### **Choose relevant sources**

Check with your instructor to see what types of sources you will be required to find. Are you looking for scholarly, peer-reviewed journals? If so, head to your library's online website and begin to search for relevant keywords. Be sure to read more than the abstract to get an idea of what your source is about.

#### **Question each source with the following:**

- What are the author's credentials?
- Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies?
- When was the source published? (Keep in mind any cutoff dates from your instructor)
  - Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic?
- Is this a first edition?
- Is this a popular magazine or scholarly journal?
  - If the source is published by a university press, it is likely to be scholarly
- Is the publication aimed at a specialized or a general audience?

#### **Engage with your sources by performing 'close reading'**

'Close reading' is the ability to devote intimate attention to the language and details of a text. Here are some tips for close reading:

- Read with a pencil in hand and annotate the text.
- Use a highlighter, but only after you've read the text for comprehension. The point of highlighting is to note key passages, phrases, and findings.
- Keep something to write on for free write summaries and response entries.

## Choose the correct format

Whether you are able to choose your own formatting, or your instructor requires a specific format, make sure you use the correct citation style. While the annotations will look the same, MLA, APA, and Chicago style will all look different when citing sources.

## **Sample MLA Annotated Bibliography Entry from Purdue Owl:**

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/common\\_writing\\_assignments/annotated\\_bibliographies/annotated\\_bibliography\\_samples.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/common_writing_assignments/annotated_bibliographies/annotated_bibliography_samples.html)

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

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.

## **Sample APA Annotated Bibliography Entry from Purdue Owl:**

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and dimed: On (not) getting by in America*. Henry Holt and Company.

In this book of nonfiction based on the journalist's experiential research, Ehrenreich attempts to ascertain whether it is currently possible for an individual to live on a minimum-wage in America. Taking jobs as a waitress, a maid in a cleaning service, and a Walmart sales employee, the author summarizes and reflects on her work, her relationships with fellow workers, and her financial struggles in each situation.

An experienced journalist, Ehrenreich is aware of the limitations of her experiment and the ethical implications of her experiential research tactics and reflects on these issues in the text.

The author is forthcoming about her methods and supplements her experiences with scholarly research on her places of employment, the economy, and the rising cost of living in America.

Ehrenreich's project is timely, descriptive, and well-researched.

### **Quick Tips:**

1. Cite the source using the proper citation style.
2. Describe main ideas, arguments, and themes.
3. Explain the author's expertise, point of view on the subject, and any potential bias.
4. Explain why the source is useful for the topic you have chosen.
5. Compare and contrast your source to other sources.
6. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each source.
  - Don't worry about discussing sources' limitations in your bibliography. No source will flawlessly fit into your annotated bibliography since you have created your own topic to research!
7. Identify the author's conclusions.