Annotated Bibliography

What is it? An annotated bibliography is a list of reading material (literature) that you select on a specific topic, with comments (annotations) summarising the key ideas of each reading, with your evaluation of its contribution to your topic.

Usually an annotated bibliography assignment is a step on the way to writing a research essay or report, but sometimes it is used as an assessment task on its own.

What is it for? An annotated bibliography might serve a number of purposes:

- To help you identify the key information for your assignments
- To show your tutor/lecturer, or a peer, your selection and interpretation of relevant readings
- To build your skills of summarising and critically evaluating texts
- At a broader level it helps other students/researchers decide if this is a useful text for them

What does it look like?

An annotated bibliography is arranged alphabetically by author’s family name (like any reference list). Each entry starts with the full reference (bibliographic details) of a source (the citation). This is followed by a brief annotation of about one paragraph (approx. 100-150 words) per citation (see the sample below). You might need somewhere between 5-20 sources, depending on your assignment.

Each annotation should include:

- A clear explanation of the topic or theme of the research material
- An identification of the key argument(s) in the source
- A description of the author’s method (e.g. how they came to their conclusions)
- A concluding sentence or two that describes what this research material will contribute to your essay

You don’t need to read the whole book or article, at this stage.

- Read the introduction or the key sections dealing with your topic
- For a journal article, read the introduction and conclusion and use the subheadings to locate the most relevant parts.
- For a scientific paper, look at the methods and the main findings as well. Scan the discussion (what did they ask? What did they learn?)
- For a report, read the summary, intro, conclusion and recommendations at the end. Use your judgement about how much more you need to read in order to know what this source says and does.

Take a look at the sample annotated bibliography entries. These are a guide only; always check with your lecturer/tutor as they may have other specific requirements.
Sample Annotated Bibliography (Business focus)
Adapted from: Will Keillor, Bethel University Library, 10/2015 Revised 9/2016

Sample 1:

This article presents the new standards for outsourcing developed by the AICPA ethics committee. The standards are summarized, and a brief discussion is included of the implications going forward for business and international trade. The authors indicate that changes to the business community will be relatively minor. This is a helpful source for getting an overview of the current ethics standards in outsourcing.

The American Management Association has created its own guide for business writing. Designed as a supplemental text to more thorough style guides such as APA, this guide covers topics relating specifically to business, such as citing financials, formatting of company reports, and professional approaches to information integrity in the workplace. This is an indispensable work for anyone doing professional business writing.


The authors present an investigation of IT outsourcing based on the combined results of a survey administered to IT firms as well as statistical measures from domestic and French or German firms. Their data covers a wide range of IT business unit types. However, the lack of longitudinal data weakens their conclusion that the slower pace of French and German IT outsourcing has had a long-term positive effect on business in those countries.