

Memorial University Libraries

How to Write Annotated Bibliographies

http://www.library.mun.ca/guides/howto/annotated_bibl.pdf

Introduction

This handout will give examples of how to write annotated bibliographies. Individual instructors may give instructions which vary from these examples. Always check with your instructor to ensure that you are writing the bibliography as he/she wants it written.

How to Write an Annotation

An annotation is a brief description of a work such as an article, chapter of a book, book, Web site, or movie. An annotation attempts to give enough information to make a decision as to whether or not to read the complete work. Annotations may be descriptive or critical.

What an annotation should include:

- Complete bibliographic information.
- Some or all of the following:
 - Information to explain the authority and/or qualifications of the author. For example: Dr. William Smith, a history professor at XYZ University, based his book on twenty years of research.
 - Scope and main purpose of the work.
 - Any biases that you detect.
 - Intended audience and level of reading difficulty.
 - The relationship, if any, to other works in the area of study.
 - A summary comment, e.g., "A popular account directed at educated adults."
- The annotation should be about 100 to 200 words.

Sample Descriptive Annotation

A descriptive annotation describes the content of the work without judging it. It does point out distinctive features.

London, Herbert. "Five Myths of the Television Age." *Television Quarterly* 10 (1) Spring 1982: 81-89.

Herbert London, the Dean of Journalism at New York University and author of several books and articles, explains how television contradicts five commonly believed ideas. He uses specific examples of events seen on television, such as the assassination of John Kennedy, to illustrate his points. His examples have

been selected to contradict such truisms as: "seeing is believing"; "a picture is worth a thousand words"; and "satisfaction is its own reward." London uses logical arguments to support his ideas which are his personal opinion. He doesn't refer to any previous works on the topic. London's style and vocabulary would make the article of interest to any reader.

Sample Critical Annotation

In addition to "What an annotation should include," a critical annotation evaluates the usefulness of the work for a particular audience or situation. The words that are in bold indicate what has been added to the descriptive annotation to make it a critical annotation.

London, Herbert. "Five Myths of the Television Age." *Television Quarterly* 10 (1) Spring 1982: 81-89.

Herbert London, the Dean of Journalism at New York University and author of several books and articles, explains how television contradicts five commonly believed ideas. He uses specific examples of events seen on television, such as the assassination of John Kennedy, to illustrate his points. His examples have been selected to contradict such truisms as: "seeing is believing"; "a picture is worth a thousand words"; and "satisfaction is its own reward." London uses logical arguments to support his ideas which are his personal opinion. He doesn't refer to any previous works on the topic; however, for a different point of view, one should refer to Joseph Patterson's, "Television is Truth" (*The Journal of Television* 45 (6) November/December 1995: 120-135). London's style and vocabulary would make the article of interest to any reader. The article clearly illustrates London's points, but does not explore their implications, leaving the reader with many unanswered questions.

How to Compose an Annotated Bibliography

Write your bibliographic entry according to the appropriate style guide (APA, MLA, Turabian, etc) and add an annotation to each entry. The annotation describes the essential details of the work and its relevance to the topic.

April 22, 2003