Writing Annotated Bibliographies

An annotated bibliography is a list of bibliographic citations for academic sources that include a brief but detailed explanation of each source (an annotation). When taken together, the annotations should help a researcher articulate a theory or answer a research question. A good annotation summarizes a source and discusses the implications of the author's ideas, particularly in light of the rest of the material in bibliography. This handout provides tips and strategies for developing a strong annotated bibliography.

Characteristics of the Genre

Bibliography	Annotations
• Formatting is central: MLA or APA? • Sources listed alphabetically by author's last name • Sources related to one another by discipline and/or focus	• Focused, critical summary of source • Conveys authorial action • Discussion of importance or significance • Connection to project/other sources • Detailed, specific language

Rhetorical Considerations

Purpose	Audience

• Keep a researcher organized throughout the (sometimes lengthy) research process
 • Provide a log of materials read and consulted for future projects
 • Helps to familiarize both the writer and reader with the conversation surrounding a given topic
	• What do YOU need from your annotated bib?
	    o Remember what's important about each source
	    o Prewrite/draft material explaining how your sources work together
	    o Keep all your notes in one place
	 • What does your professor need?
	    o Details about your sources – are you on the right track?
	    o Check in with your project
	    o Provide support

Use detailed, specific language: Annotated bibliographies are meant to help researchers and their colleagues keep track of important information and record insights and analysis about source material. In light of this purpose, the language in annotated bibliographies should be clear and free of any vague or empty language. If a sentence could be just as easily applied to another source in your bibliography, then it's too vague. (e.g. "This article provides good information," or "There are many pros and cons" are both too vague.)

Use scholarly templates: Templates allow you to insert your unique information into a commonly used phrase that already carries the tone and authority of academic prose. Since all academic writers use such phrases, and since the important ideas are still being supplied by you, you don't need to cite or worry about plagiarism when you're using templates. Templates can also help you remember to include important elements of academic prose and distinguish between your ideas and those of your sources.

Introducing implications

- One implication of X's treatment of ___ is ___.
- Ultimately, what is at stake here is ___.

Agreeing and Disagreeing with Reasons

- X's theory of ___ is useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of ___.
- By focusing on ___, X overlooks the deeper problem of ___.
- X overlooks what I consider to be an important point about ___.

Embedding voice signals

- I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls ___.
- My own view is that what X calls a ___ is in fact a ___.
- I dis/agree, as X may not realize, that ___.

Capturing Authorial Action

- X acknowledges that ____.
- X demonstrates that ____.
- X suggests that ____.
- X emphasizes that ____.
- X reminds us that ____.
- X urges readers to ____.

Tips for Annotated Bibliography Success

- Make an appointment for research support at Langsdale Library and writing support at the Writing Center!
- Don't set out to find sources that validate your opinions or support an imagined thesis; instead, look for sources that answer your research questions and read with an open mind.
- Writing a good annotated bibliography takes time. Start earlier than you think you need to, and write your annotations as you go.
- Your annotations should explain what makes that author's ideas significant, to your own research or to some larger problem that you want to address. If you can't explain why an article is useful, then it may not be. Find a better one!
- Use detailed, specific language in your annotations. Each sentence should say something specific about the author's research and argument or their implications.
- Always give the action of sentence to the author, and choose specific verbs that convey the tone or importance of the author's message. (e.g. ~~*This articles states*~~ *Sarah Connor argues that cyborgs are dangerous, and she contends that we should never allow them access to our networks.*)