# Welcome to the Purdue OWL

This handout provides information about annotated bibliographies in MLA format.

# Annotated Bibliographies

## Definitions

A **bibliography** is a list of sources (books, journals, websites, periodicals, etc.) one has 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, title, publisher, etc.).

An **annotation** is a summary and/or evaluation.

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

**PART 1: 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.

**Sentence Starters**:

1. The main idea of this article is…….
2. The topics covered in this article are…….
3. The author’s point of view in this article is...

**PART 2: 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 it credible? Is the information reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?

**Sentence Starters:**

1. The author of this piece is/is not credible because……
2. The author knows a lot about this topic because….
3. From this piece, the author wants you to………….

**PART 3: 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?

**Sentence Starters:**

1. This article supports my ideas because…..
2. This article was helpful to me because….
3. This article added to my knowledge about this topic because…

## 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're forced to 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. So 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.

**To help other researchers**: Extensive and 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.

## Format

Our citations and annotations will use MLA format.

**The Annotations**

The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the purpose. If you're just writing summaries of your sources, the annotations may not be very long. However, if you are writing an extensive analysis of each source, you'll need more space.

You can focus your annotations for your own needs. A few sentences of general summary followed by several sentences of how you can fit the work into your larger paper or project can serve you well when you go to draft.

# Annotated Bibliography Citation Examples

Elizabeth Thompson Professor Stacks English 102

20 August 2001

## Stem Cell Research: An Annotated Bibliography

Holland, Suzanne. *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy*. Boston: MIT Press, 2001. Print.

This is the annotation of the above source, which is formatted according to MLA 2009 (7th ed.) guidelines for the bibliographic information listed above. If I were really writing an annotation for this source, I would offer a brief summary of what this book says about stem cell research.

After a brief summary, it would be appropriate to assess this source and offer some criticisms of it. Does it seem like a reliable and current source? Why? Is the research biased or objective? Are the facts well documented? Who is the author? Is she qualified in this subject? Is this source scholarly, popular, some of both?

The length of your annotation will depend on the assignment or on the purpose of your annotated bibliography. After summarizing and assessing, you can now reflect on this source. How does it fit into your research? Is this a helpful resource? Too scholarly? Not scholarly enough? Too general/specific? Since "stem cell research" is a very broad topic, has this source helped you to narrow your topic?

**Senior, K. "Extending the Ethical Boundaries of Stem Cell Research." *Trends in Molecular Medicine* 7 (2001): 5-6. Print.**

Not all annotations have to be the same length. For example, this source is a very short scholarly article. It may only take a sentence or two to summarize. Even if you are using a book, you should only focus on the sections that relate to your topic.

Not all annotated bibliographies assess and reflect; some merely summarize. That may not be the most helpful for you, but, if this is an assignment, you should always ask your instructor for specific guidelines.

# Annotated Bibliography Sample

**Overview**

Below you will find a sample annotation from an annotated bibliography. Remember that the annotations you include in your own bibliography should reflect your research project and/or the guidelines of your assignment.

As mentioned elsewhere in this resource, depending on the purpose of your bibliography, some annotations may summarize, some may assess or evaluate a source, and some may reflect on the sources possible uses for the project at hand. Some annotations may address all three of these steps. Consider the purpose of your annotated bibliography and/or your instructor’s directions when deciding how much information to include in your annotations.

Please keep in mind that all your text, including the write up beneath the citation, must be indented so that **the author's last name is the only text that is flush left.**

In the sample annotation below, the writer includes three paragraphs: a summary, an evaluation/assessment of the text, and a reflection on its applicability to his/her own research, respectively.

## Sample MLA Annotation

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

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.