Annotated Bibliographies

Background

A bibliography is a list of all the sources that you have used during the course of your research. An **annotated bibliography** follows the same alphabetical format as a regular bibliography, but it can contain three additional elements: a summary, an evaluation, and a reflection.

Structure

Why use an annotated bibliography?

- **Why it matters:** Instructors will often assign annotated bibliographies as a way to encourage students to critically assess the value of their sources before using them.

- **When to use it:** It is useful to write an annotated bibliography before starting an essay because it'll allow you to assess the worth and relevance of your sources before you commit to using them.

- **A note on variations of annotated bibliographies:** Be sure to read through your assignment guidelines to determine the parameters of your specific assignment. Your particular bibliography may not require all three elements.

How to create an annotated bibliography?

- **Step 1: Finding good sources**

    - Find and choose sources that are relevant to your topic. Refer to the guide to academic research included in the Additional Resources to get a better sense of how to conduct effective research.

- **Step 2: Determining relevant information for summary**
    - Read through your sources and identify some key information. Annotate in the margins or on a word document as necessary. Identify the author's thesis, which can usually be found within the introduction and/or conclusion. Identifying the thesis will orient your understanding of the main argument and will help you write an accurate summary. You'll also want to pay particular attention to topic sentences, which are usually found at the beginnings of paragraphs. These topic sentences will have the main focus of the paragraph stated concisely. After compiling this information, condense this information down into a brief paragraph that states not only the contents of the source, but also its central argument. Don't be afraid to use a formulaic sentence like "[the author] argues….".
- **Step 3: Writing a reflection**
    - Ask yourself *why* you've chosen this source and whether the source contributed to your research. Is there information in this source that expands the scope of your topic? Does this source contain a set of data that you intend to use? How did the source help your research?
- **Step 4: Writing an evaluation**
    - When evaluating a source, you will need to maintain an objective and critical perspective. Think about concepts such as reliability, bias, agendas, accuracy, logic, and chronology. Does the source offer logical arguments that are supported by sound evidence? Are there

possible political or personal agendas? Are there fallacies? When was the study or source written, and how does this affect the value of the source?