WRITING TYPES AND TOOLS

Writing An Annotated Bibliography

(1) Differences Between a Reference Page and Annotated Bibliography

Conducting research and documenting your findings is an essential part of the ‘academic’ writing process. Unless your professor instructs you to do otherwise, all projects must include in-text citations, quotation marks (when using direct quotes), and a reference page. This happens during the process of composing a paper. There are times when you will need (or be required) to conduct initial research prior to deciding on a thesis or focus. An annotated bibliography is a helpful tool to help you track and assess these sources. The following table illustrates the main differences between a reference page and an annotated bibliography:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Reference Page</th>
<th>Annotated Bibliography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lists sources that you actually used in a project</td>
<td>Follows APA formatting conventions (Click here for an example)</td>
<td>A research tool that lists all sources you have examined in preparation for a project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Follows APA formatting conventions and includes an annotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>There are NO annotations in a reference page; there is no need for them since you have put all of your research together.</td>
<td>The idea here is that you can refer back to your annotated bibliography at any time as you write your research paper and find any material you are looking for.</td>
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</table>
(2) Components of an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography includes topic research, complete source citation, and a short annotation (paragraph) for each source. How annotations are written depends on the purpose of the research. There are two main components for each source included in an annotated bibliography:

- **Bibliographic information**: This includes the complete citation information formatted using correct APA format. This is the information you would normally include on a reference page.
- **Annotation**: This is a short paragraph about the source. Again, how this is written depends on the purpose and/or requirements of the research.

(3) Purposes of Writing an Annotated Bibliography

Writing an annotated bibliography is an effective way to document the research process and better prepare for a first draft. When your instructor requires you to create an annotated bibliography, he or she is setting you up for success. Among others, the results can include a focused preliminary thesis and a detailed analysis of possible resources. Following are more details of the purposes and benefits of writing an annotated bibliography:

- **Formulate a Thesis**: Conducting research is a prewriting activity that can help narrow the focus of a topic that you are researching. Writing annotations for each source can help you understand the breadth and depth of a subject and determine your focus.
- **Review the Literature**: An annotated bibliography can assist you with the research for a paper topic by helping you analyze the available literature. This is especially helpful for relatively new or persuasive topics where it is important to read about multiple sides of an issue.
- **Illustrate the Direction of Your Research**: An employer or professor may want a preview of your research prior to the final draft of your paper. An annotated bibliography is a way to show your audience your current research and its usefulness.
- **Help Other Researchers**: When other researchers find your paper particularly engaging, they often will examine your reference page. However, an annotated bibliography gives the reader more information about a source, such as a summary, and
she or he can make an informed decision about whether to locate that source. With a reference page, the reader has to guess whether a source will be useful and relevant.

(4) Ways to Annotate Sources

There are several ways to write annotations depending on the purpose of the bibliography and/or the requirements of the assignment or research. Common approaches to writing annotation include the following:

- **Summarize the Source:** Summarizing information about a source means to state briefly the main ideas of the source in relation to the current research. For instance, a medical book may have multiple chapters, but the only part to summarize for this source is the information that pertains to research for the current paper’s topic. Please note: A summary must be written in your own words.

- **Evaluate the Source:** To evaluate a source means the writer determines the strengths and weaknesses of the piece in relation to a particular research topic. The reliability and validity of the source are also determined.

  1. **Reliability:** This refers to the source’s credibility. Is it biased? Is the article from a website that is also selling a product related to the subject of the article? Is there a hidden agenda in the source?

  2. **Validity:** This indicates the accuracy or correctness of the information. Is the information gathered from experts? Is it just the opinion of the author? Is the author an authority on the topic at hand? What are his or her professional or academic credentials?

- **Reflect on the Usefulness of the Source:** How does this source fit in with the current research project? Is this a source you can use in your paper? Is it better suited as a starting point to find other sources (i.e., is it useful only for background information)?

- **Combination:** Any combination of the above approaches to writing an annotation may be required. You may choose to write a separate short paragraph for each approach, or combine them into one annotation. As always, it is essential that you are careful to restate things in your own words to avoid plagiarizing the authors’ original ideas.
(5) Sample Citations with Annotations

Here are examples of sources that have been cited using APA guidelines and followed with an annotation using the previously mentioned techniques. Please note which techniques or combinations of techniques have been used.


This is a short article geared mostly toward digital developers who either are programming more than 10,000 lines of code or are programming within teams. It also emphasizes the importance of a VCS, but more so in the development environment. For this project, the only thing I might use this for is the simple statement that while VCS is great for any work environment, without the discipline to use them regularly, they are worthless.


This site includes detailed instructions for operating an open source VCS. It is written for a technical audience that must have some background on this particular system. What is interesting about this site is the idea of open source. Maybe there are other version control systems available via the Internet through shareware sites. This particular site will probably not be used in writing the final project, but it is a source that can lead to further research on this idea of freeware for a VCS.


This is great article with an overview of the details inside a VCS—branching, configuration, repository, access management, and more. What makes this article valuable though is the overview of several version control systems on the market (at least in 2001). After reading through the overview of several products, if one fits what my company is looking for then I can begin searching for that product and further information on the Internet. This article may or
may not be used in the actual writing of the final proposal, but it will be useful information for further research on the project.