



Annotated Bibliographies

Annotated bibliographies are like book or article reviews in that they concern scholarly texts which are focused on a specific topic, yet annotated bibliographies cover many more sources and are much more condensed in form.

The purpose of an annotated bibliography is to provide your reader with a fairly comprehensive though concise list of relevant scholarly sources on a given topic. Each entry, generally consisting of 2-10 sentences in addition to the citation, of an annotated bibliography provides full bibliographical information as well as commentary about each source. When the commentary summarizes the book or article and explains how the author addresses the topic, it is called a descriptive annotation. The commentary might also include an evaluation of the quality of the information; in answering the question of how successfully the author achieved what he/she set out to do, you are writing an evaluative annotation.

The key to a successful annotated bibliography is to be concise; since each entry's commentary is brief, you need to select the information carefully. Determine the source's central idea(s) and be concise in conveying that information. An entry to an annotated bibliography is not an appropriate time to go into great depth or detail. Primarily, you want to give the reader a general idea of what the source is about. This will require the ability both to determine what is central and to write about the ideas concisely and objectively.

Here is an example of a descriptive annotation:

Schechter, Harold. "Death and Resurrection of the King; Elements of Primitive Mythology and Ritual in 'Roger Malvin's Burial.'" *English Language Notes* 8 (1971): 201-05.

Working with Frazer's paradigm of the death and resurrection of the King motif in myth and ritual, Schechter sees Malvin as the dying king in Hawthorne's short story and Reuben as his successor. Reuben sacrifices Cyrus so that the curse of death-in-life can be removed. Thus, the tale becomes the imaginary fulfillment of the blessing of fertility (204).

Here is an example of an evaluative annotation of the same source:

Schechter, Harold. "Death and Resurrection of the King: Elements of Primitive Mythology and Ritual in Roger 'Malvin's Burial.'" *English Language Notes* 8 (1971): 201-05.

Though Schechter reorganizes the material in an interesting format, basically his study is a reiteration of Cassier's seminal argument in *The Sacred and the Profane: Modern Myth Studies*. Schechter's major contribution to the debate is his recognition that Reuben sacrifices Cyrus so that the curse of death-in-life can be removed. Schechter's attempt to put Cassier's argument in a Jungian context is intriguing but not quite successful, since he must ignore important elements in the story to do so.

You will sometimes be asked to turn in an annotated bibliography as a step to completing a larger research project. This is actually a good opportunity to sort through your most important sources and review them before you begin to incorporate them into a research paper. Topics for an annotated bibliography vary widely. If it is part of a research project, the topic for the paper will determine the topic and scope of the bibliography. However, if it is not a part of a research project, you will either be given a topic or will choose your own. Generally, the more specific the topic, the less frustrating the research and writing will be. But even with a very specific topic, you will have to find your own focus on it, or the research could well seem boundary-less.

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