



An annotation is more than a brief summary of a book, article, or other publication. Its purpose is to describe the work in such a way that the reader can decide whether or not to read the work itself.

A bibliography, of course, is a list of writings and is a standard appendage to a scholarly book or article. An annotated bibliography, in which each item is summarized, is valuable because it helps the reader understand the particular uses of each item. The ideal bibliography discusses the relationships of one item to another.

The following 6 points provide **guidance** for writing an annotation:

1. The authority and the **qualifications of the author**, unless extremely well known, should be clearly stated. Preferably this is to be done early in the annotation: "John Z. Schmidt, a Russian history professor at Interstate University, based his research on recently discovered documents."
2. The scope and **main purpose of the text** must be explained. This is usually done in one to three short sentences. For example, "He reveals that a few Germans played a key role in the events leading up to the revolution. They provided money, arms, and leadership that helped the revolution get started." Unlike an abstract, which is an abridgement or synopsis, the writer cannot hope to summarize the total content of the work.
3. The **relation of other works**, if any, in the field is usually worth noting: "Schmidt's conclusions are dramatically different from those in Mark Johnson' *Why the Red Revolution?*"
4. The major bias or **standpoint of the author** in relation to the theme should be clarified: "However, Schmidt's case is somewhat weakened by an anti-German bias, which was mentioned by two reviewers."
5. The **audience** and the level of reading difficulty should be indicated: "Schmidt addresses himself to the scholar, but the concluding chapters will be clear to any informed layman." This is not always present in an annotation but is important if the work is targeted to a specific audience.
6. At this point the annotation might conclude with a **summary comment**: "This detailed account provides new information that will be of interest to scholars as well as educated adults."

EXAMPLES

Schmidt, J.Z. (1973). *Causes of the Russian Revolution*. New York: Herklon.

Schmidt, a Russian history professor at Interstate University, based his research on recently discovered documents. He reveals that a few Germans played a key role in the events leading up to the revolution. They provided money, arms, and leadership that helped the revolution get started. Schmidt's conclusions are radically different from those in Mark Johnson's *Why the Red Revolution?*. However, Schmidt's case is somewhat weakened by an anti-German bias, which was mentioned by two reviewers. Schmidt addresses himself to the scholar, but the concluding chapters will be clear to any informed layman. The style is heavy and argumentative, with many footnotes. This detailed account provides new information that will be of interest to scholars as well as educated adults.

Mélendez, A. (1990). The Effects of Local Labor Market on Puerto Rican, White and Black Women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 35 (3), 4-24.

Considering earnings, unemployment, city size, industrial change, and other variables, the author, a researcher at M.I.T., focuses on the impact of local labor market conditions and infers differences in the long-term trends in labor force participation for each of these groups. He supports the thesis that White women are less responsive to income change and more responsive to the discouraged worker effect when unemployment rises than either Black or Puerto Rican women. Other factors affect Black or Puerto Rican population more so than the White. Based on studies by Bowne and Finegan (1969) and Santana-Cooney (1979) this work goes even further in detailing labor market impact on work force participation.

Note

There are, to be sure, other elements in various types of annotations, but if the six points noted are covered, the annotator can at least be certain the strategic territory has been adequately surveyed. By definition annotations are short notes and are normally no more than 150 words. Verbosity is the major sin; brevity and clarity the goal.

For further information:

Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: Annotated Bibliographies

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_annotatedbib.html

California State University Northridge Oviatt Library: Creating an Annotated Bibliography

http://library.csun.edu/Research_Assistance/annotated.html

Cornell University Olin & Uris Libraries: How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>