How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is more than a list of your paper’s sources; it also summarizes each source’s content, evaluates its merits and shortcomings and explains its contribution to your own research. Whoever reads your annotated bibliography will be able to determine how thorough you have been in researching your topic and selecting your sources. Compiling an excellent annotated bibliography will demonstrate your ability to conduct independent research critically and effectively.

What to include

Because you need to justify the inclusion of each source, it’s important to look through a wide range of material and choose only what’s most relevant to your project. When you begin your research, be sure to limit your scope to what your teacher deems legitimate and appropriate sources for your particular assignment. This will probably include peer-reviewed scholarly articles, but may also include films, historical documents or popular media such as newspapers and magazines. To learn how to conduct research effectively, ask your teacher or consult a reference librarian in Vanier’s library.

Old vs. new

In the sciences, it is important to use the most current available sources because new theories and findings often supersede older ones. In the humanities, it’s also a good idea to incorporate “essential sources”, which are major works or figures that have made significant contributions to their fields. These may be decades or even centuries old (e.g. Confucius for political philosophy, Marx for socioeconomics, Freud for psychology, etc.). In these disciplines, the contemporary authors you research will likely reference essential sources in their arguments. If you come across more than two references to the same author or article while researching your topic, there’s a good chance that it’s an essential source that should be included in your annotated bibliography.
Anatomy of the annotated bibliography

In general, each citation should be roughly 100-200 words in length and should contain some or all of the following components (be sure to check with your teacher for specifics). See the examples for clarification.

- **Source citation:** follow the citation style guidelines used by your teacher (MLA, APA, etc). In general, your sources should be listed alphabetically by each author’s last name.
- **Author background:** Briefly state the author’s level of expertise with the topic (if applicable).
- **Content:** provide a short outline of the topic covered by your source.
- **Thesis:** Identify the author’s position/central argument as well as any perceived biases.
- **Method / Arguments:** Describe how the author arrived at her/his conclusions (if applicable).
- **Evaluation / Criticism:** Evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the thesis, arguments and/or approach. Why is this good source? What has been left out?
- **Contribution to research question:** How is the source relevant to your assignment? Did the source redirect your arguments or add to your conclusions?

Tips and Resources

- Good research and proper formatting are both very time consuming. Be sure to begin your assignment well ahead of the due date.

- Follow the specific citation formatting guidelines provided by your teacher. For additional help with citing sources, consult [http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/vc-library/students/guides.html](http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/vc-library/students/guides.html). You can also ask the reference librarian or a tutor from The Learning Centre for help.
• Online databases are the best place to search for periodicals and peer-reviewed scholarly articles. Vanier College has access to nearly 40 separate databases. Click [http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/vc-library/databases.html](http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/vc-library/databases.html) for the complete list. Ask the reference librarian for help in finding the best sources for your project.

**Example (using APA):**


Stamp collector and critic Ophelia Ma *(author’s background)* introduces theories of national identity to one of the world's most popular and longstanding hobbies: stamp collecting *(content)*. Delving into a wide range of seemingly innocuous themes for stamps – including movie stars of film noirs, prime ministers, and bunnies – Ma argues that the production and collection of topical stamps is "an essentially nostalgic enterprise" (113) that reinforces traditionally held views about culture and society, and which may even "manufacture nostalgia or an entirely new mythos where none existed before" (114) *(thesis)*. Extensive interviews with stamp collectors and general stamp users reveal that looking at and handling – or even being aware of – certain stamps informs citizens of their nation's history and generates a sense of pride and unity *(method/arguments)*.

Unfortunately Ma stops here: deeper investigation into the effects of cross-cultural and multinational stamp exchange and how it relates to constructing ideas about other nations is needed *(evaluation/criticism)*. Despite this, the focus on Canadian philately is particularly useful. Ma also provides a comprehensive bibliography *(contribution to research question)*.
Example (using MLA):


Meg Holle, librarian and zombie scholar, serves both fields in this treatise on zombie attack disaster planning for libraries. Though targeting academic libraries, her surveys of how building design affects strategic positioning (for zombie prevention, horde dispersal, and quarantine activities) could easily be applied to public libraries or other university and civic buildings. Unlike many zombie survival guides, Holle makes the crucial distinction between "fast" and "slow" zombies, structuring the book and her arguments accordingly. This is especially useful for point-of-need quick lookup. She also includes several instructive diagrams, example floor plan repurposing and readiness checklists. Despite otherwise inclusiveness, Holle disparages the theory of zombie infection or inhabitation by extraterrestrial beings. As a result *Zombieproof!* does not address the issues of zombie-alien warfare and associated complications (e.g., limb regeneration or mind-controlled "smart" zombies).

Source: http://library.uvic.ca/instruction/cite/annobib.html