Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review Basics

Writing Center
Walden University
You might also hear or see

**Annotated bib**

or

**Annotation**

or

**Lit review**

All of these terms are synonymous with

*annotated bibliographies* or *literature reviews*.
Annotated Bibliographies

What does the term mean?

According to *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* (2011),

**Annotate**: “to make or furnish critical or explanatory notes or comment”

**Bibliography**: “the history, identification, or description of writings or publications”

How do these definitions combine?
The purpose of an annotation bibliography is

- To learn about a particular topic
- To demonstrate the value of a particular source
- To inform fellow or future researchers about a topic or a source
Annotated Bibliographies

The format of an annotated bibliography can change depending on the assignment, but the typical format is a list of reference entries followed by annotations.

- Alphabetized by author
- No headings
- Brief

Be sure to ask your instructor about any alternative expectations for your specific assignment.
Annotated Bibliographies


The authors described the constructive and creative role of an honors course in science and religion that was pedagogically based on Lavee's learning cycle model. In Lavee's model, the student writes a short paper on a subject before a presentation of the material and then writes another paper evaluating and supporting his or her views. Using content analysis, the authors compared the answers in the first and second essays, evaluating them based on Fowler's stages of development. Examples of student writing are presented with the authors' analysis of the faith stage exhibited by the student, which demonstrated development in stages 2 through 3.

The authors make no specific effort to support spiritual development in the course. They were interested in the interface between religion and science, teaching material on ways of knowing, creation myths, evolutionary theory, and ethics. They exposed students to Fowler's ideas, but did not relate the faith development theory to student work in the classroom. There appears to be no effort to modify the course content based on the predominant stage of development, and it is probably a credit to their teaching that they were able to conduct such a course with such diversity in student faith development. Moreover, since Fowler's work is based largely within a Western, Christian setting, some attention to differences in faith among class members would have been a useful addition to the study. There was no correlation between grades and level of faith development.

Fowler's work would seem to lend itself to research of this sort, but this is the only example found in recent literature. This study demonstrates the best use of the model, which is assessment. While the theory claimed high predictive ability, the change process documented is too slow and directional due to a lack of interest in change and implementation research that had a direct measurement of movement in faith development continuum.


In this article, Menter stated that policing is a highly stressful occupation. Researchers suggested that the level of stress varied based on assignment. Menter reported the findings of a qualitative study conducted at two large metropolitan police departments in the South that deployed officers in undercover operations to investigate crimes. The researchers noted that current literature primarily focused on juvenile delinquency when examining general strain theory. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to extend the empirical application of general strain theory to a high-stressed adult population, specifically, police officers on undercover assignments.

Menter pointed out that since the early 19th century strain theories have been used to describe crime and delinquency. For the purpose of this study, he used general strain theory as a theoretical framework to test the application of the theory on a high-stressed adult population in order to determine how officers in different policing assignments cope with stress and deviance. He utilized phenomenological methodology to mitigate one of the criticisms of the general strain theory that individual experiencing stress or similar circumstances often start differently in deviance or delinquency.

Menter's research added to the general strain theory with regards to the concept of deviance beyond acts labeled as delinquent or criminal and confirmed his hypothesis that the application of this theory could be extended to an adult population. Further support of the theory was found in the coping strategies utilized by undercover officers to reduce stress. For example, officers
Within each annotation, there are typically three elements:

- Summary
- Critique/analysis
- Application

These elements can often be formatted as three paragraphs.
You will want to answer some or all the following questions:

- What is the topic of the source?
- What actions did the author perform within the study and why?
- What were the methods of the author?
- What was the theoretical basis for the study?
- What were the conclusions of the study?
How to approach a summary:

- Similar to an abstract of a source
  - In the past tense
  
    "The authors found..."

- Not the abstract of an article
  - Should be written in your own words
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Example Summary:


The authors described the construction and rationale of an honors course in science and religion that was pedagogically based on Lawson’s learning cycle model. In Lawson’s model, the student writes a short paper on a subject before a presentation of the material and then writes a longer paper reevaluating and supporting his or her views. Using content analysis, the authors compared the answers in the first and second essays, evaluating them based on Fowler’s stages of development. Examples of student writing are presented with the authors’ analysis of the faith stage exhibited by the students, which demonstrated development in stages 2 through 5.
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Critique/Analysis

You will want to answer some or all the following questions:

• What are the strengths and weaknesses of the article?
  – Methodology, language choices, organization, level of detail

• What, if any, information is missing?

• Is the article *scholarly* or generalizable? Why or why not?
How to approach a critique/analysis:

• Focus on strengths of the article or study
  – What would make your reader want to read this source?

• Do not feel the need to be nice
  – Your reader will want to know if there are any deficiencies or areas for improvement
Example Critique/Analysis:

The authors made no mention of how to support spiritual development in the course. They were interested in the interface between religion and science, teaching material on ways of knowing, creation myths, evolutionary theory, and ethics. They exposed students to Fowler’s ideas, but did not relate the faith development theory to student work in the classroom. There appears to have been no effort to modify the course content based on the predominant stage of development, and it is probably a credit to their teaching that they were able to conduct such a course with such diversity in student faith development. However, since Fowler’s work is based largely within a Western Christian setting, some attention to differences in faith among class members would have been a useful addition to the study. There was no correlation between grades and level of faith development.
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Application

You will want to answer some or all the following questions:

• Does this article fill a gap in literature?
• How would you be able to apply this method to your area of focus?
• Is the article universal?
Annotated Bibliographies

How to approach the application:

• Consider how you would justify the use of the source for your paper
  – How is this source different than others in the same field or on the same topic?
  – How does this source inform your future research?
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Example Application:

Fowler’s work would seem to lend itself to research of this sort, but this model is the only example found in recent literature. This study demonstrates the best use of the model, which is assessment. While the theory claimed high predictive ability, the change process chronicled is so slow and idiosyncratic that it would be difficult to design and implement research that had as its goal measurement of movement in faith development continuum.

These three elements create an annotation.
Annotated Bibliographies

There are some unique characteristics of which to be aware regarding annotations:

- **No citations** crediting the source or outside sources
  - The presence of the reference entry make citation redundant
- **No direct quotes**
  - Your reader will want to hear your interpretation of the material
- **No referrals to the first person**
  - Be objective and removed in your description of the source
- **No reference list**
  - All sources have already been included in the reference list format

Again, be sure to contact your instructor for his/her expectations for your particular assignment.
Example of annotated bibliography in MLA format:

Elizabeth Thompson
Professor Stacks
English 102
20 August 2001

Stem Cell Research: An Annotated Bibliography


This is the annotation of the above source. In this example, I am following MLA 2009 (3rd ed.) guidelines for the bibliographic information listed above. If I were really writing an annotation for this source, I would offer a brief summary of what this book says about stem cell research. After a brief summary, it would be appropriate to assess this source and offer some criticisms of it. Does it seem like a reliable and current source? Why? Is the research biased or objective? Are the facts well documented? Who is the author? Is she qualified in this subject? Is this source scholarly, popular, some of both? The length of your annotation will depend on the assignment or on the purpose of your annotated bibliography. After summarizing and assessing, you can now reflect on this source. How does it fit into your research? Is this a helpful resource? Too scholarly? Not scholarly enough? Too general/specific? Since "stem cell research" is a very broad topic, has this source helped you to narrow your topic?


Not all annotations have to be the same length. For example, this source is a very short scholarly article. It may only take a sentence or two to summarize. Even if you are using a book, you should only focus on the sections that relate to your topic. Not all annotated bibliographies assess and reflect; some merely summarize. That may not be the most helpful for you, but, if this is an assignment, you should always ask your instructor for specific guidelines.


Notice that in this example, I chose a variety of sources: a book, a scholarly journal, and a web page. Using a variety of sources can help give you a broader picture of what is being said about your topic. You may want to investigate how scholarly sources are treating this topic differently than more popular sources. But again, if your assignment is to only use scholarly sources, then you will probably want to avoid magazines and popular web sites.

Notice that the bibliographic information above is proper MLA format (use whatever style is appropriate in your field) and the annotations are in paragraph form. Note also that the entries are alphabetized by the first word in the bibliographic entry. If you are writing an annotated bibliography with many sources, it may be helpful to divide the sources into categories. For example, if I were putting together an extensive annotated bibliography for stem cell research, I might divide the sources into categories such as ethical concerns, scholarly analyses, and political ramifications.

For more examples, a quick search at a library or even on the Internet should produce several examples of annotated bibliographies in your area.

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