

Writing an annotated bibliography

What is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a brief summary and evaluation of a number of selected texts. It includes the full referencing details of each text placed in alphabetical order. It also includes a brief description or summary of the contents, a brief critical analysis or critique and often an evaluation of the relevance and usefulness of the text.

You might be asked to produce an annotated bibliography to:

- become familiar with a particular topic or area of study, often to help you prepare for a future assignment
- produce a relevant resource list (e.g. an age-specific reading list for a primary school class, a list of up-to-date resources/readings for a particular topic area)
- help you learn how to reference correctly.

In general, an annotated bibliography should:

- include the full bibliographic details of each text formatted according to the referencing system you are required to use (e.g. APA 6th, Harvard). This often serves as the heading for each entry in your bibliography.
- include a summary, overview or brief description of the contents of each text
- include a critical analysis or critique of each text (strengths and weaknesses of the text)
- include a statement of the relevance or usefulness of each text (e.g. to others in that area of study or work, or to a particular assignment task)
- position each entry in alphabetical order according to the author's surname.

When you begin:

- Find out what your lecturer is expecting by reading the assignment task and marking criteria carefully (e.g. number of annotations, word limit).
- Use your research skills and reading skills to select the texts that will enable you to complete your assessment task.

Writing the summary

Here you can demonstrate your skills in summarising and paraphrasing. Avoid quotes. Focus on the main ideas in the text and don't be distracted by details. Some questions to ask are:

- What is the main idea (or ideas) being presented?
- What ideas and evidence are used to support this idea/point?
- What are the key findings or conclusions of the text?

Writing the critique, including a statement of relevance

The critique is your critical response to the text you have read. These comments can be placed after the summary or integrated into the summary. Some questions to help you evaluate or judge the text include:

- Does the text contribute to my understanding of the topic? If so, in what way?
- Does it add to the existing knowledge on this topic? If so, in what way (draw on additional or prior readings about the topic)?
- How does the structure, organisation and presentation of the ideas in the text contribute to its effectiveness?
- How well does the author achieve his/her purpose?
- Would you recommend this text to someone interested in this topic?
- What are the text's strengths or weaknesses/limitations?
- Is the text credible/reliable, current or up to date, and does it demonstrate any bias?
- How useful/relevant is the text for your topic area and/or your assignment or research?

Extract from an annotated bibliography

Assignment task: Read and begin to think about how you would respond to the ethical issues involved in the case study. Include 5 entries each with a max. of 200 words.

Collis, S. P. (2006). The importance of truth-telling in health care. *Nursing Standard*, 20(17), 41–45.
<https://doi.org/10.7748/ns.20.17.41.s55>

This article examines the concepts of truth-telling and deception and whether deception is ever justifiable in health care. Possible reasons for the recent interest in truth-telling in health care are offered as well as issues associated with deceiving patients. Wider arguments supporting and opposing deception in health care are considered before suggested alternatives to the use of deception in patient care are outlined. It appears to be a well-researched and well-structured article that uses examples to provide a brief understanding of some of the ethical issues (e.g. trust and duty, truth-telling, deception or selective non-disclosure) that confront nurses when trying to communicate effectively and ethically with the terminally ill patient. However, while the article is very useful in helping to clarify arguments it does not give a rule as to how one should decide. This literature is highly relevant to the case study as it explores the ethical issues of truth-telling as opposed to non-disclosure in regard to beneficence and non-maleficence and recommends that these decisions should be individualised. It points out that the patient may suffer psychologically if told the truth, or if the manner in which they are told is not conducted with extreme sensitivity.

Note how this annotation:

- begins with the bibliographical details for the text (in APA 6th format)
- includes a *brief* summary of the contents/focus of the text
- includes critical comments about the text – in this case, positive comments, as well as comments about limitations of the text
- evaluates the relevance of the text for the assignment topic.

Related Quick Guide

Summarising and paraphrasing