

An **Annotated Bibliography** is a specific way to keep track of your ideas as you research.

The word *annotated* means to take notes, and a *bibliography* is a list of the things you're reading. For this exercise, write a paragraph or more summarising and analysing the article and then plan for how to use it into your own writing. Often times we do our reading in a rush or take notes haphazardly. An annotated bibliography offers a disciplined method for keeping track of our thoughts when they are fresh and makes it easier to recover them later.

How to do it

When you are researching, you will probably first scan through a number of articles and choose to keep a separate folder for the ones you find especially useful. When you begin reading through these chosen articles, open up a blank word processing document, or keep an open notebook ready. Read through the text and highlight or annotate as you normally would. Then, when you are finished reading:

- **Write a summary of the article in your own words.**
What is the overall argument/purpose? What research did they conduct? What were their conclusions?
- **Write an analysis of the article in your own words.**
Was the argument flawed in any way? Are there unanswered questions? What makes the work valid?
- **Write a plan for how you will make use of this article in your own work.**
Where would you mention the article in your essay? What does it contribute to your argument?

Tips

View the annotated bibliography as a letter to your future self and write it accordingly. It does not need to be overly formal, but it should reflect your own thinking about the text. If you want to truly get the most benefit, read many articles consecutively and write your annotated bibliography entries for each. As you keep reading and writing them you will be able to connect and compare the arguments in each article. That is the essential skill required for an effective Literature Review section on longer essays--like dissertations. Make each entry as long or as short as you will need. Transcribing the best quotes from your sources will also make it easier to insert them into your final essay.

Example

Lamott, A. (2005). *Shitty First Drafts*. In: P. Eschholz, A. Rosa and V. Clark, ed., *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers*, 9th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, pp.93-96.

In this article, Lamott offers a confessional description of her writing process. When she writes, it is a really chaotic and frustrating event, but one that she accepts. The purpose of the article seems to be for young writers to relax a bit in the early stages of writing. If they feel too much pressure to be perfect, then they will freak out too much and not get to those later stages with much energy or attention left. ← **SUMMARY** | **ANALYSIS** → Her article addresses the reader in a really engaging way, and she writes with a clarity of purpose that seems to fit with the younger students she is addressing. Lamott argues that, “Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere.” While I think this is important for students to read for its sense of relief, isn't it also possible to have a specific place to start? The limitation of this text is probably that it should immediately be followed by some options for *how* to start in the best way for each student. **PLANNING** → In my essay on the writing process, I would use this in the section on the importance of writers to reflect on their own processes as a starting point to improving. I specifically like the quote above for discussing the need for *some* students to relax a bit in the early stages.

Conclusion

The three components of the annotated bibliography are designed to plant the seeds of later writing. By keeping track of ideas as you research will not only save time lost later in trying to recover them, but the freshness of the ideas will add depth and immediacy to the writing throughout the whole process. Try it and see for yourself if it is useful. Also, adapt it to your purposes--find new ways to organise information, experiment with new formats or styles. Make it yours.