Writing an Annotated Bibliography

What is a Bibliography?
A bibliography is a list of references -- books, articles, websites, etc. -- that have been cited in a work you have produced.

What is an Annotation?
An annotation is a ‘note’ which accompanies a work. Annotations can be written for many purposes, but they are most commonly used to explain, comment, critique, or interpret particular aspects of a work.

What is an Annotated Bibliography?
An annotated bibliography is a bibliography where some, or all, of your references are given annotations. The following four types of annotations are most commonly used in annotated bibliographies:

- **Descriptive Annotations** - Describes the content of a particular work.
- **Summary Annotations** - Summarizes the argument(s) or key points of a particular work.
- **Critical Annotations** - Discusses how a particular work fits, or doesn’t fit, with your research agenda.
- **Combined Annotations** - Some combination of descriptive, summary, or critical annotation styles.

Why Write an Annotated Bibliography?
Many reasons, but you are most likely writing an annotated bibliography to demonstrate that:

- You are on the right track with your research.
- You are selecting material which is appropriate to your topic.
- You are thinking about how your research will contribute to your paper.
- You are not overwhelmed when it comes time to write your paper.

Where Can I Get Help With my Annotated Bibliographies (and Other Stuff)?
Schewe Library. Our Librarians, Mike Westbrook (mwestbro@mail.ic.edu) and Luke Beatty (luke.beatty@mail.ic.edu), would be happy to help you. Seriously, if you’re having trouble, ask for help! That’s what we’re here for!
Descriptive Annotations

A descriptive annotation describes the content and/or composition of a work. The descriptive annotation can include information about: the type of work under report (book, article, DVD, website, etc.), the type of research being done in the work (study, literature review, experiment, etc.), authors or contributors, names of chapters or sections, tables & figures, length, or anything else you feel is important to describe the work.

Example APA Descriptive Annotation


This fifty-page journal article, by Caroline Hirasawa, discusses the history of Hell imagery in Japanese culture. The article includes sections on: the geography of Hell; visual interpretations of Hell; Judgment Day; avoidance of punishment whilst in Hell; sundering Hell; and depictions of Hell which utilize humor. The article is peppered with images -- come color, some black-and-white -- which reproduce famous paintings and drawings in the Japanese Hell canon. The article also contains frequent English-to-Japanese translations, which are also reproduced in the References list. Finally, the article also includes a series of detailed footnotes, primarily used to unpack obscure concepts or direct the reader towards additional reading.

Example MLA Descriptive Annotation


This book, by Eva Dodsworth, is an introductory resource for Library & Information Science (LIS) professionals who are looking to familiarize themselves with Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The book has six chapters: the first chapter deals with GIS background information; the second chapter discusses GIS awareness and Web 2.0 tools; the third chapter offers tutorials of popular web mapping software; the fourth chapter introduces GIS desktop and data software; the fifth chapter explores open-access GIS projects; and the last chapter focuses on integrating GIS into existing library structures. The book also includes a series of figures (mostly screenshots), an extensive index, and a CD-ROM containing a number of KML files for the reader to experiment with.

Example Chicago Descriptive Annotation


This twenty-page article, by Carol Kasworm and Lis Hemmingsen, compares two graduate schools -- one Danish, the other American -- which offer Master’s degrees in Adult Education. The article begins with an introductory literature review, continues by discussing the Danish and American higher educational contexts, settles into a comparison between the two schools, and concludes with a discussion of its findings. Kasworm and Hemmingsen compare the two schools across a number of criteria, including: engagement with theory; innovative instructional practices; policies regarding professional preparation; assessment measures; admissions policies; course offerings, and mandated program hours.
Summary Annotations

A summary annotation highlights the key point(s) and/or argument(s) of a work. This type of annotation relies, to a degree, on your judgment, as the “main points” of a work are usually debatable. There will, however, be certain threads in a work which are more prominent than others, and you should identify those. While a descriptive annotation simply lists a work’s content, a summary annotation actually unpacks that content.

Example APA Summary Annotation


Though Hirasawa’s article touches on a number of aspects of Japanese Hell imagery, the article’s main objective is to demonstrate that Hell imagery was profoundly reconfigured by Japanese commoners. Historically, Japanese religious figures presided over depictions and writings of Hell; however, when commoners began to co-opt these canonical writings, competing visions of Hell found their way into the Japanese public domain. Moreover, the influence of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity also contributed to a ‘loosening’ of the Japanese Hell canon, eventually paving the way for irreverent, and in some minds, heretical depictions of Hell. Even today, Japanese Hell imagery continues to evolve, though this article only covers developments up to the 20th century.

Example MLA Summary Annotation


This book is a practical, hands-on guide for Library & Information Science (LIS) professionals seeking an introduction to Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The book is light on theory, and is more concerned with introducing a select few products to the LIS practitioner. *Google Earth Pro*, *ArcGIS*, and *SimplyMap* are given extensive coverage, and there are a number of exercises and examples for the reader to follow (should they choose to work with the aforementioned products). The book also devotes considerable time to comparing web-based GIS applications to their desktop counterparts. Dodsworth concludes that while web-based products are useful, they would best be used alongside, rather than in substitution for, desktop GIS solutions.

Example Chicago Summary Annotation


This article is a comparative case study between two graduate programs -- one Danish, the other American -- which offer Master’s degrees in Adult Education. The findings suggest that while each program is doing a good job in preparing lifelong learning adult educators, much of the difference in the two programs is attributable to cultural and sociological differences between Danish and American students. Other findings of significant difference include: the number of women enrolled in the programs (there are a higher percentage of women in the Danish program); investment in distance technologies (the American program is more heavily invested); and the commercialization of the programs (the American students bear a higher cost of self-funding).
Critical Annotations

A critical annotation briefly assesses a work. This assessment can take many forms, but often includes making judgments about: how the work fits into your research; how convincing the work/research is; what the work might have missed; and how the work fits in with the larger discipline. A critical annotation isn’t necessarily meant to find fault with a work, but rather, it allows one to explore the work’s ins-and-outs.

Example APA Critical Annotation


This article discusses the history of Hell imagery in Japanese culture, and concludes that both religious elites and commoners significantly contributed to the development of the Japanese Hell canon. Though Hirasawa’s analysis is thorough, more time could have spent detailing how the clergy “lost control” of their canon. The reproductions in the article are helpful in contextualizing particular Hell images, and without these reproductions, the article would be less impactful. It should also be noted that while Hirasawa gives a fulsome analysis of painting and sculpture, her analysis of literature is less deep. Given that the article spends a considerable amount of time in the Japanese Medieval period -- the focus of my paper -- it will be a cornerstone of my research.

Example MLA Critical Annotation


With regard to recent Library & Information Science (LIS) books on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Dodsworth’s Getting Started... is the only work of note. There are a number of LIS-themed journal articles dealing with GIS -- for example, Weessies & Dotson’s Mapping for the Masses... or Enis’ Mapping out a Plan... -- but Dodsworth provides the only book-length treatment of GIS material. The book is written for practitioners, and while that’s not entirely relevant to my research, at least it gives a glimpse of how GIS software is being used in the LIS field. A deeper theory component would help ground the work, but that angle doesn’t seem to interest Dodsworth overmuch. In virtue of it being the only game in town, this is an important work for my research.

Example Chicago Critical Annotation


There is a considerable literature base dealing with the training of childhood educators; the literature base is much thinner when discussing lifelong learning adult educators. This article is a case study, and though the findings are particular to the schools under comparison, the Danish and American schools nonetheless make for an odd pairing. The two schools -- and the contexts within which they operate -- are so foundationally different that I can’t imagine what the authors were hoping to get out of this analysis. For my paper, this article will provide a relevant, if minor, addition. For those seeking to learn (more) about the educational philosophies of Danish and American graduate programs, this article would be useful. For me, not so much.
Combined Annotations

A combined annotation includes some combination of descriptive, summary, and/or critical annotation styles. A combined annotation is often used when longer annotations are called for (by your Professor, for example). A good strategy is to spend a short paragraph on each annotation style, thus ensuring all your bases are covered. The provided examples are shorter than typical combined annotations would be, but you get the point.

Example APA Combined Annotation

This fifty-page journal article, by Caroline Hirasawa, discusses the history of Hell imagery in Japanese culture. The article includes sections on: the geography of Hell; visual interpretations of Hell; Judgment Day; avoidance of punishment whilst in Hell; sundering Hell; and depictions of Hell which utilize humor. The article’s main thrust is to demonstrate that Japanese Hell imagery was profoundly reconfigured by commoners and the influx of non-native religions into Japan. Though Hirasawa’s analysis is thorough, more time could have spent detailing how the clergy “lost control” of their canon. Given that the article spends a considerable amount of time in the Japanese Medieval period -- the focus of my paper -- it will be a cornerstone of my research.

Example MLA Combined Annotation

This book, by Eva Dodsworth, is an introductory resource for Library & Information Science (LIS) professionals who are looking to familiarize themselves with Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The book has six chapters, variously taking the reader through relevant GIS applications for LIS professionals. In particular, *Google Earth Pro*, *ArcGIS*, and *SimplyMap* are given extensive coverage, and there are a number of exercises and examples for the reader to follow should they choose to work with these products. The book is written for practitioners, and while a deeper theory component would help ground the work, that angle doesn’t seem to interest Dodsworth overmuch. In virtue of it being the only game in town, this is an important work for my research.

Example Chicago Combined Annotation

This twenty-page article, by Carol Kasworm and Lis Hemmingsen, presents a comparative case study between two graduate programs -- one Danish, the other American -- which offer Master’s degrees in Adult Education. The schools are compared across a number of criteria, and the findings suggest that while each program is doing a good job in preparing lifelong learning adult educators, much of the difference in the two programs is attributable to cultural and sociological differences between Danish and American students. The two schools -- and the contexts within which they operate -- are so foundationally different, though, that I can’t fathom what the authors were hoping to get out of this analysis. This article will be a relevant, if minor, addition to my research.