Writing an Annotated Bibliography

What is an Annotated Bibliography?
Bibliography means “list of books”, and annotation means “notes”. An annotated bibliography is a list of books (and other sources) with notes. It lists sources that you found and explains how they are useful for your project. Sources can be books, newspapers, magazines, scholarly articles, websites and more. Each entry includes two parts: a citation and an annotation (see examples on back). The annotation summarizes the source and evaluates how useful it is.

What Should be Included in an Annotation?
Annotations have two parts: a summary and an evaluation. The quick summary (1-3 sentences) gives a basic overview of what the source says. The evaluation part of the annotation is more important than the summary and should be longer (4-5 sentences or more).

What Should be Included in the Evaluation?
There are several elements that can be included in the evaluation part of your annotation. Sometimes, professors will list specific aspects to consider. Here are a few that you might want to include:

Format - Is this a book, scholarly article, newspaper, magazine, website or another format?

Reliability - Does the source come from a reliable place (e.g., book, scholarly peer-reviewed article, government website...)? Does it seem to be supported by other sources that you have found?

Content/Relevance - How useful is this source for your project?

Purpose/Audience - Why was this source written and for whom?

Authority - Is the author an expert? Some sources will list an author’s credentials (e.g., Professor at George Mason University or President of Poetry Society of America). Is the project sponsored by an authoritative organization like the American Heart Association or a government agency?

Bias - Does the author examine the issue from a balanced perspective?

Currency - How current is the information?

Ease of Use - Was the source easy to read and understand?

Comparison - How does this source compare to others in your annotated bibliography? What makes it “special”?

Criticism – What are the source’s strengths and weaknesses? Do you agree with the conclusion reached and methods used? It is okay to use a source even if you disagree with some parts.
Examples (in MLA Format)


This book claims that the modern criminal justice system unfairly treats African American men and compares this to Jim Crow laws and segregation. Due to mass incarceration, there are too many African American men in prison. The author (Associate Professor of Law, Ohio State University) makes logical arguments that are easy to follow. Unlike other sources on the topic of race and mass incarceration, this book provides extensive statistical evidence to support the author’s claims. For example, while African American males make up 14% of the total U.S. population, they make up over 40% of the U.S. prison population. This source will help show that there are racial differences in incarceration rates and that mass incarceration leads to institutionalized racism.


A recent survey by the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council ranked Virginia as the twelfth most business-friendly state in the nation and Maryland as thirty-sixth. Virginia’s low taxes and fewer corporate regulations make it ideal for business. The author of this newspaper article offers a balanced look at the survey results, pointing out that the organization conducting the survey is very conservative and that there is some disagreement about whether low taxes make a state business-friendly. States with higher taxes are able to spend more on infrastructure, such as roads, schools, colleges and other features that enhance the state economy. The author presents viewpoints from the governor of Virginia and several Maryland politicians. This article will help to demonstrate that state policies impact how attractive a state is to business owners.


The authors of this article examine two supposedly haunted sites in England in order to determine the cause of the hauntings. They find that the “hauntings” are caused by psychological mechanisms activated by environmental factors such as lighting and magnetic fields. This article was published in the peer-reviewed scholarly journal *British Journal of Psychology* and the authors are professors at two prestigious universities. Their findings are similar to other articles on this topic, which explain reports of “ghostly activity” as psychological reactions to environmental stimuli. This article, however, identifies several new factors that were not considered in other articles – such as changes in lighting and magnetic fields. This supports my thesis that paranormal events have real-world psychological explanations, and it demonstrates how environmental factors can deceive the mind.