

Annotated Bibliography Explained

An annotated bibliography is required for all categories. It should contain all sources that provided usable information or new perspectives in preparing your entry. You will look at many more sources than you actually use. You should list only those sources that contributed to the development of your entry. Sources of visual materials and oral interviews must be included. The annotations for each source must explain how the source was used and how it helped you understand your topic.

For example:

Bates, Daisy. *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*.

1st ed. New York: David McKay Co. Inc., 1962.

Daisy Bates was the president of the Arkansas NAACP and the one who met and listened to the students each day. This first-hand account was very important to my paper because it made me more aware of the feelings of the people involved.

An annotation normally should be about 1-3 sentences long. You might be tempted to create page-long annotations to impress people. Don't do it! Lengthy annotations are usually unnecessary and inappropriate, and might be considered an effort to "pad" the bibliography.

The Contest Rule Book states that the annotations "must explain how the source was used and how it helped you understand your topic." Do not recount what the source said.

In addition to explaining how you used a source or how it helped you, you sometimes need to include some additional information in an annotation. Here are some examples:

- **Classification of primary or secondary source.** You should use the annotation to explain why you categorized a particular source as primary or secondary, If that is likely to be at all controversial. Historians do sometimes disagree and there's not always one right answer, so justify your choice to the judges.
- **Secondary source which included primary sources.** You also may use the annotation to explain that a book or other secondary source included several primary sources used for the paper. Examples: "This book included three letters between person X on the frontier and person Y back in New England, which provided insight into the struggles and experiences of the settlers." "This book provided four photos of settlers on the Great Plains and their homes, which were used on the exhibit."
- **Fuller explanation of credits for documentaries.** You are supposed to give credit in the documentary itself for photos or other primary sources, but you can do this in a general way, such as by writing, "Photos from: National Archives, Ohio Historical Society, A Photographic History of the Civil War" rather than listing each photo individually in the documentary credits, which would take up too much of your allotted 10 minutes. You then must use the annotation in the bibliography to provide more detailed information.

- **Should I list each photograph or document individually?** You should handle this differently in notes than in the bibliography. When you are citing sources for specific pieces of information or interpretations, such as in footnotes or endnotes, you should cite the individual document or photograph. In the bibliography, however, you would cite only the collection as a whole, not all the individual items. You should include the full title of the collection (e.g., Digges-Sewall Papers or the Hutzler Collection), the institution, city and state where the collection is located (e.g., Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Md.). You can use the annotation to explain that this collection provided 7 photographs which you used in your exhibit or that collection provided 14 letters which were important in helping you trace what happened. The same treatment applies to newspaper articles. In the footnotes or endnotes, you should cite the individual articles and issues of a newspaper. In the bibliography, you would list only the newspaper itself, not the individual issues or articles; you can use the annotation to explain that you used X number of days of the newspaper for your research.
- **How many sources should I have for my annotated bibliography?** We can't tell you a specific number of sources, as that will vary by the topic and by the resources to which you have reasonable access. For some topics, such as the Civil War or many 20th-century U.S. topics, there are many sources available to you. For other topics, such as those in ancient history or non-U.S. history, there likely are far fewer sources available to you. The more good sources you have, the better, but don't pad your bibliography. Only list items which you actually use; if you looked at a source but it didn't help you at all, don't list it in your bibliography.