The Annotated Bibliography: What Students Need to Know Video Transcript

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What is an annotated bibliography? The simple answer is that an annotated bibliography serves several purposes. It lists the formatted citations from the sources that you have gathered for a research project. These sources could be from books, articles, websites, or any other documents that you are considering for a research project. The next feature of an annotated bibliography is, of course, the annotation. Underneath the citation information, you will include a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph. Depending upon your assignment instructions, your annotation may need to accomplish the following: provide a summary of the source content, provide an assessment or evaluation of the sources, and provide an explanation as to how and why this source addresses your research question. This tells your reader about the relevance and quality of your sources. The process of completing an annotated bibliography allows you to think critically about your sources so that you are selecting the best sources and not just the first sources you located.

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So, why do we write annotated bibliographies? One reason is to gain experience with reference citation formatting. The more you practice using APA or MLA, the better you will get. Also, since citation formats are an indicator of how well you understand the conventions of writing in a particular discipline, you can increase your perceived authority. An annotated bibliography also provides an opportunity to see your sources as a whole, rather than separate pieces. This gives you the opportunity to see if you have a balanced representation of the information available about your topic. The most important reason to write an annotated bibliography is because it slows down the process of research. To write an annotated bibliography, you can’t just plug in search terms and use the first results. It gives you a chance to really think about information that you have retrieved. It can also allow you to see if your own views are coloring your research with bias. Don’t be surprised if you discover during the writing of an annotated bibliography that you need to conduct further research. This happens frequently. Finally, writing an annotated bibliography helps you with the structure and planning of a research essay. Now that you have engaged with your sources, you are well-placed to organize your thoughts and supporting material to write that first draft.

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You should contact your instructor or course materials for course-specific questions. For further assistance with the research process or citation format, please use the Ask a Librarian feature from the Fullerton College Library website to ask one of you Fullerton College librarians. We’re here to help.