



Annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of relevant scholarly research on a related topic with a summary of each source. You could think of it as an informative reference list: a reference list with a concise description and evaluation of each entry.

How does an annotated bibliography differ from a literature review?

There are some similarities between an annotated bibliography and a literature review, but they differ in purpose and structure.

The following table provides a comparison between annotated bibliographies and literature reviews.

	Annotated Bibliography	Literature Review
Purpose	To survey the literature on a topic and gain an understanding of each source by concisely summarising and evaluating it.	'To determine what is known on the topic, how well this knowledge is established and where future research might best be directed.' (University of Melbourne, 2013).
Content	Citation or reference of each source, with a brief summary, evaluation, and reflection on its content and usefulness. Exact content determined by assessment task instructions.	Critical review of one or more pieces of literature. May be in response to a stimulus or question to narrow the scope of the literature search and the focus of the review.
Structure	Sources organised alphabetically . May not need an introduction or conclusion – check your assignment instructions.	Ideas are to be organised thematically to show how sources relate to each other and contribute to knowledge about the topic (don't just write a new paragraph for each source). Usually needs an Introduction, Body, and Conclusion.
Approach to sources/literature	Critical, concise, reflective. The individual sources are the subject matter of the writing.	Critical. The sources, both individually and collectively, are the subject matter of the writing.

Preparing an annotated bibliography

This guide takes you through the basic process of conducting a literature review. There are three main steps, which are similar to the usual steps required to complete a written assignment (see [Assignment Calculator](#) for details – use the Essay template):

- Finding the literature;
- Reading, understanding, and evaluating the literature;
- Writing the annotated bibliography.

Finding the literature

In undergraduate assignments, you may be given specific sources to read and review, or you may need to find your own sources.

If you are given specific literature to review, go to 'Reading, understanding, and evaluating the literature' below.

If you need to find your own sources:

- The [Library Successful Searching tutorial](#) will help you start your search well.
- Rather than reading all the sources in depth, survey them first to check if they are relevant to your literature review topic. Work through the short interactive tutorial on [Pre-reading techniques](#).
- You'll need to also evaluate all the sources you find to make sure they are scholarly and appropriate for your task. Watch the [Library video on evaluating sources using APPEAL](#) (video, 6:26) and use the [APPEAL evaluation worksheet](#) (PDF, 268 kB) as you read the sources.

Reading, understanding, and evaluating the literature

The resources on the Library Study Smart page on [Researching and reading](#) will help you with this step. You could also watch the Library video [Annotated Bibliographies: What they are and how to prepare one](#) (video, 2:21) or check out Monash University's [Annotated Bibliography guide](#), which includes interactive learning activities.

- Begin to develop your understanding of the sources by skimming and scanning them. You can find more information on these reading processes in the interactive tutorials on [Pre-reading techniques](#) and [Selective reading](#).
- Once you have gained a general understanding of a source, read it closely and actively. Work through the short interactive tutorial on [Active reading](#) to help you with this step.
- Critically evaluate the literature. Apply [critical thinking skills](#) (PDF, 112 KB). Consider what factors you will use to evaluate or organise the sources. It could be helpful to use a matrix or [graphic organiser](#) (PDF, 55 KB) to help you evaluate the sources.
- Reflect on how each source relates to your topic. If your annotated bibliography is the first stage in a bigger assignment (e.g. a research project or essay), think about how useful this source will be for the broader assignment and how you might use it. For example:
 - Does it provide background information or historical context?
 - Does it give an example of how someone used a methodology similar to the one you will use?
 - Does it help you define your key terms?
 - Does it show how other people have studied the same topic area in a different way?

Writing the annotated bibliography

When you come to write your annotated bibliography, follow the process described on the next page. You can also find general help with paragraphs, sentences, and grammar under the 'General writing help' section of the [Study Smart Assignment Help Writing page](#).

Organising your ideas

Your annotated bibliography may or may not need an introduction and conclusion. Check your assignment instructions to find out what is required.

Each source has its own distinct entry, starting with the full citation using the required referencing style. After the citation, you write a coherent paragraph summarising and evaluating the source. See the table below for the content to include in each paragraph.

Arrange the sources in alphabetical order (by surname of lead author) under the overall heading, just like a reference list.

For more information on referencing and citation styles, see the [Library Referencing and Citation guides](#).

Element	Comments
Heading	Use a heading that indicates the subject of the entries. Centre the heading at the top of the page.
Introduction	Optional – check your assignment instructions.
Source entry A (100-200 words, depending on assignment instructions)	<p>Full citation Use the required referencing style as specified in your assignment instructions.</p> <hr/> <p>Summary Concise description of the source, including a summary of the key points and findings (check assignment instructions for level of detail required).</p> <hr/> <p>Evaluation Briefly comment on the strengths and limitations of the source and the research it describes.</p> <hr/> <p>Reflection Comment on the relevance of the source to your topic or field of study.</p> <hr/> <p>Subheadings Optional (check assignment instructions).</p>
Source entry B	as above
Source entry C	as above
Source entry D	as above
Source entry E	as above
etc...	
Conclusion	Optional – check your assignment instructions.

Example

The example below shows an entry (203 words excluding reference) from an annotated bibliography with a citation in APA style. In the table on the following page, each element of the entry has been identified and the main features of each element are noted in the right hand column.

Rindell, A., Strandvik, T., & Wilén, K. (2014). Ethical consumers' brand avoidance. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 23(2), 114-120. doi:10.1108/JPBM-09-2013-0391

In this article, Rindell, Strandvik and Wilén (2014) examine 'brand avoidance among "active ethical consumers"' (p. 114), with the aim of determining to what extent ethical issues contribute to brand avoidance. A qualitative approach was taken through interviewing fifteen people, all members of NGOs that champion ethical causes such as animal rights, environmental protection and social/human wellbeing (for example, Fair Trade). The interviews were analysed based on the interviewee's main type of ethical concern. The authors argue that, unlike traditional brand avoidance, 'ethical concerns lead to rather stable and persistent rejections of brands, often rooted in historical events' (p. 117), which are important considerations when developing a branding strategy.

The main limitation of Rindell et al.'s work is that the study was restricted to fifteen people – a small sample size – and also active members of NGOs. Therefore, more research will need to be undertaken to see whether these trends are reflected amongst consumers more broadly. The authors acknowledge this in their conclusion, and suggest that brand avoidance could also be motivated by other values, for instance, relating to religion or culture, which could warrant further study. This article will be used in my research for the essay, in conjunction with broader discussions of branding.

Text	Element
Rindell, A., Strandvik, T., & Wilén, K. (2014). Ethical consumers' brand avoidance. <i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i> , 23(2), 114-120. doi:10.1108/JPBM-09-2013-0391	Full citation: APA style
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The main limitation of Rindell et al.'s work is that the study was restricted to fifteen people — a small sample size — and also active members of NGOs. Therefore, more research will need to be undertaken to see whether these trends are reflected amongst consumers more broadly. The authors acknowledge this in their conclusion, and suggest that brand avoidance could also be motivated by other values, for instance, relating to religion or culture, which could warrant further study.	Evaluation: Limitations Areas for further research
This article will be used in my research for the essay, in conjunction with broader discussions of branding.	Reflection: relevance to own research

Adapted from Monash University (2017).

Expressing your evaluative stance

As with an essay or report, your tone in an annotated bibliography should be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. We can plot these dimensions for an annotated bibliography as follows:



You can read the [Essay tone PDF](#) (67 KB) to find out more about these dimensions.

In an annotated bibliography, you need to not only list and summarise the sources, but also evaluate them and reflect on their relevance to your topic. Your language needs to be formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. Where you reflect on how to use the source in your research, you may use more personal language (see the example above, where the personal pronoun 'my' is used in the last sentence).

References

Monash University. (2017). Annotated bibliography. Retrieved from <http://www.monash.edu/rlo/assignment-samples/assignment-types/annotated-bibliography>

University of Melbourne. (2013). Reviewing the literature: a critical review. Retrieved from http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicsskills/all_resources/writing-resources