

HPSC 1000: Bioethics
Rachel A. Ankeny
How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography

GENERALLY, WHAT IS AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY? An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, documents, and other textual (and sometimes non-textual) materials, often gathered within the context of research for a major project. Each citation is followed by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the ‘annotation.’ The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the source’s basic content, focus, relevance and usefulness to the project or question, limitations (e.g., is it still timely?), and quality (in terms of the author’s credibility, the validity of the methodology, and the persuasiveness of the argument). For projects such as essays or theses, an annotated bibliography allows you to keep track of source materials to be used in the future and can form the basis for a literature review section or chapter.

WHY CAN’T I JUST USE THE ARTICLE’S OWN ABSTRACT? Abstracts are purely descriptive summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in database indices. They do not provide any evaluation of the article nor do they allow the source material to be assessed with regard to its relevance to a particular context (such as a research question). They may have been written by the author herself or even by someone skimming the article as part of a professional service, and therefore cannot be assumed to be accurate. Book reviews also are dangerous as they may not be balanced or provide the most relevant information. In contrast, annotations are both descriptive and critical. Annotated bibliographies should be in the ‘voice’ of the person gathering the materials and annotating them, and hence should record your interpretations of and reactions to the source material.

WHAT TYPES OF SOURCE MATERIALS ARE ACCEPTABLE? Any materials that are relevant to your topic or question should be considered, but typically you should focus on scholarly work, such as academic journal articles, monographs (single-author books) with citations, chapters in edited collections, or policy documents (sometimes only available on the web). Other possible types of source materials are oral histories, documentary films, legal cases, or serious journalistic articles (i.e., those that have been researched and are of sufficient length to develop an argument). In all cases, if the source is not likely to be easily accessible for those who will read the paper, you should include a copy of the material with your submission or information on how to source it in your notes (e.g., where a transcript of a documentary is available). Web pages should be used very sparingly, as they are unreliable in many cases or else contain information that is actually accessible in printed form. If you can’t find information about the author, or no author is included (here ‘author’ can refer not only to an individual, but a governmental department or a recognised organisation, for instance), a webpage should not be used as a scholarly research source.

HOW DO I CONSTRUCT AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY? Creating an annotated bibliography involves a variety of academic skills: informed library research, critical reading, selective inclusion of relevant materials, succinct analysis, and concise exposition:

(1) **Do a very general search:** locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and other documents that may contain useful information and arguments related to your topic. Briefly examine and review the actual items (never include anything in an annotated bibliography that you haven’t sourced and read!). Select for annotation those materials that provide a variety of perspectives on your research question and/or that allow you to support your anticipated argument (as well as to defeat counterarguments). This initial search should contain an adequate

number of sources for the research project in which you are engaged; what types of source materials (and how many) are appropriate will differ from project to project and discipline to discipline (e.g., history versus sociology versus philosophy).

(2) **Construct the citation:** write up the citation to the book, article, or document using an appropriate style (see below). For longer projects such as a thesis, you might want to use a bibliographic program for the citations (since they allow automatic formatting) and use the 'notes' section to write your annotation. Whichever style you pick, this is the one you should use for your final essay or project as well.

(3) **Write the annotation:** Write a concise annotation that summarizes the central theme and scope of the book or article in a descriptive manner, including the main argument and conclusion. You may wish to include relevant quotes or phrases that you expect to go back to when writing up your final project; always include page numbers and also work the quoted material into a complete sentence (don't let it stand on its own). Include one or two sentences that are evaluative, that is, that compare or contrast this work with another you have cited, and explain how this work illuminates your topic. Generally if your annotated bibliography is going to be read by others or submitted for a unit of study as part of your research, you should write the annotation in complete sentences that together form a continuous, coherent paragraph, not in 'telegraphic' style (where the focus is on clear and concise information, but without use of complete and grammatically correct sentences, typically used where an annotated bibliography is only for your own use).

(4) **Select annotated entries to include:** The process of building an annotated bibliography is a gradual one; for most projects, you should end up with many more entries than you may in fact use. Usually in HPS we will ask you to submit a smaller number of entries (5-10) to show that you have been doing focused research in preparation for a presentation or written assessment; select the most central, useful, and/or creative (e.g., those that go well beyond our readings) source materials that you have read and annotated for this submission. With the final essay, we usually will ask for a more extensive annotated bibliography (15-20 sources, depending on the UOS).

CHOOSING THE CORRECT FORMAT FOR THE CITATIONS: The Unit for HPS encourages you to use any style which is most relevant to your discipline or major, but we recommend either Chicago A (see <http://writing.colostate.edu/references/sources/chicago/> for an online guide) or the American Psychological Association (APA) author-date format (see <http://writing.colostate.edu/references/sources/apa/index.cfm>).

WHAT SHOULD MY ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY LOOK LIKE WHEN I'M FINISHED? You should include the question or topic on which your annotated bibliography is focused at the start of your submission. Then arrange the annotated bibliography as you would any other bibliography, namely alphabetically (citations are typically ordered by the author's last name or the first letter of the document title where no author is provided). The annotation should immediately follow the citation of the source.

SAMPLE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ENTRIES

The following example uses the **APA format** for the book citation:

DeGrandpre, R.J. (1999). *Ritalin nation: rapid fire culture and the transformation of human consciousness*. New York: W.W. Norton.

This book provides an argument against viewing Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) as a biological condition. DeGrandpre, a professor of psychology, argues that the effectiveness of Ritalin in treating ADD does not conclusively prove that the disorder has a purely biological foundation. Studies with Ritalin have shown that it improves the efficiency and attentiveness of children (and adults) whether or not they have been diagnosed with ADD. The author describes ADD as a condition resulting from our “hurried society” (p. xx) with its emphasis on speed, and Ritalin as an unsatisfactory quick-fix, thus providing an argument against biological explanations for ADD and in favour of a socio-cultural one. Although his thesis is persuasive, it is not supported by original research or even systematic analysis of psychological/psychiatric literature, but is based on generalised observations. However, it does provide an important perspective on the context in which ‘new’ behaviour disorders emerge, and the implications of whether we consider them to be biologically or culturally mediated.

This example uses the **Chicago A format** for the magazine article citation:

Fumento, M. 2003. Trick question—a liberal ‘hoax’ turns out to be true. *The New Republic*, 3 February, 18.

This article addresses the belief amongst U.S. American conservatives that ADHD is a ‘hoax’ made up by liberals, and explains some of the ‘myths’ behind the disorder, for instance claims such as “ADHD isn’t a real disorder,” “ADHD is part of a feminist conspiracy...” and “Ritalin is kiddie cocaine.” Fumento produces arguments against previous popular books and articles on the subject and makes a conservative case for the judicious use of ADHD drugs. The article is informative about some of alternative views on ADHD, but is obviously biased in presenting a particular political view and has not been refereed. However, its inclusion in a popular political magazine demonstrates that ADHD has become much more than a medical/psychiatric issue, an issue that will be explored in more depth in my essay.

This example also uses **Chicago A format** for the URL (note there are various ways to format various types of internet source materials and you should consult the style guidelines):

Novartis Pharmaceuticals USA. 2005. ADHD/ADD-Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Accessed 28 April 2005. <http://www.pharma.us.novartis.com/conditions/parents/adhd.jsp>. Internet document.

This is a website developed by Novartis Pharmaceuticals, the company that manufactures Ritalin which is the most common method of treatment for ADHD. The website seeks to provide information about the disorder. The website claims the disorder can be most effectively treated through a combination of behavioural management, counselling, and (not surprisingly!) medication; without treatment, a child’s development will suffer, according to the company. Obviously, any major pharmaceutical company has considerable profits motives in promoting knowledge about disorders for which their products provide treatment. However, this website is extremely important for my research on parents’ perceptions and understanding of ADHD, as it is likely to be one of the first places where they might source material about the disorder, particularly as Novartis has been one of the major sponsors of the support group CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder).

Information on annotated bibliographies sourced from Cornell University Library, “What is an Annotated Bibliography?” <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>; University of Wisconsin at Madison Writing Center, “Annotated Bibliographies” <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/AnnotatedBibliography.html>; Owen Williams for the University of Minnesota Crookston Library, “Writing an Annotated Bibliography,” <http://www.crk.umn.edu/library/links/annotate.htm>, all websites accessed 28 April 2005.

Sample entries modified from HPS student submissions, with permission.