Exemplary Research Award:
A Guide to Annotations

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Abstracts vs. Annotations: The Differences

Writing annotations requires more than providing a summary of your sources. Be sure to provide "annotations" and do not simply provide the descriptive "abstracts."

- Abstracts are descriptive summaries found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles and in periodical indexes (electronic databases). Abstracts, similar to Executive Summaries, summarize the contents of an article or other information resource positioned from within the author's perspective.
  NOTE: copy and pasting an author's abstract as your summary is academic dishonesty.

- Annotations are brief summaries of an article or research paper positioned from outside the original author's perspective. The kind of annotation can vary, but there are commonly three rhetorical operations. There is always a (i) **summative** element. That summary can work to put the work into a deeper context through (ii) **evaluation** and/or (iii) **analysis**.

Annotations

For the Exemplary Research Award, successful application of **evaluative** and **analytical** annotations make for a more 'exemplary' understanding and demonstration of the research process.

While almost always summative in one way or another (focus of the summary can depend on your USE of the research, e.g. borrowing a methodology or building off of a claim), the (i) **summary** would include brief explanation on the original article's claim, method/lens, and the research implications. Then that summative information is placed into a deeper context that can be (ii) **evaluative** and/or (iii) **analytical**, depending on *how* the information is used.

Evaluative annotation components begin with standard discussion/explanation of author credibility (ethos) and the usual summary information (logos). That information is then **evaluated** in terms of how it helps, advances, or progresses the Project. The evaluative method asks questions: How was the research helpful? What questions or complications did the research resolve? What complications did it present and not resolve? Why did this matter in the development of my project? How was the research applied or beneficial towards this project?

Analytical approaches commonly contextualize the research by positioning it with other research. Here, part of the original paper, say perhaps a method or conclusion, may be in comparison or contrast with another method or conclusion from an ***ADDITIONAL*** article or information resource. The analytical approach is the most complex and reveals threads and conversations among the research. Hence, the analytical performance is the often considered the "goal" for a successful annotation.

The Process

Creating annotations calls for the application of a variety of intellectual skills: informed library research, succinct analysis, and adherence to style guide conventions. Here is a list of the four major steps in developing those annotations.

1. Select three (3) to five (5) of the most useful sources cited in the paper, preferably those works that were helpful in the completion of the project.
2. Create a citation for each information resource using the same documentation style in the original paper (APA, MLA, IEEE, etc.).
3. Write a 150 to 250 word annotation following each citation, summarizing the central theme and scope of the book, article or document and analyzing the work as it relates to your project. (See evaluation criteria below.)
4. Organize annotations in alphabetical order.

Award Evaluation Criteria

Each annotation should include as many of the following criteria as possible:

- Explain the authority or background of the author (ethos).
- What is the main idea of the paper? What is its conceptual focus? (logos)
- What is the methodology? How do the authors build their claim? (logos)
- What is the utility/purpose of the source for the project you are working on? What is the background information, scholarly research, or general claim(s) that help to advance understanding of your topic? (evaluation)
- Compare or contrast this work with other resources, *especially* other entries in the Bibliography. (analysis)
- Attaches conclusions of the article into the larger conversation happening among and between research and information sources, locating the ideas of the paper in this context places it among a continuum of intellectual and experimental conversations within the field. (metacognitive analysis)

Writing Tips

- Avoid arguing the correctness or wrongness of claims or decisions of the authors, except in terms of how those decisions advance (or not) the research project.
- Focus on objective tone: 'the author claims…,' 'the data used proved the researchers…,' 'The authors conclude that…,' etc. Keep focus on the article that is annotated.
- Avoid generalizations (e.g., "This book is good...," "Smith is an interesting writer...," etc.).
- Avoid meaningless adjectives such as "excellent," "good," "very," "interesting," etc.
- Avoid the first person singular ("I"). Keep it about the research and your **project**
- Do not begin each annotation with "This book..." or "This article...". Contextualize the research and the authors in a way that is helpful.

Sample Annotated Bibliography Entry (APA)

Waite, L. J., Goldscheider, F. K., & Witsberger, C. (1986). Nonfamily living and the erosion of traditional family orientations among young adults. *American Sociological Review*, *51*(4), 541-554. DOI: 10/1012351023.325/asr.125

The authors, researchers at the Rand Corporation and Brown University, use data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Young Women and Young Men to test their hypothesis that non-family living by young adults alters their attitudes, values, plans, and expectations, moving them away from their belief in traditional sex roles. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in young females, while the effects were fewer in studies of young males, increasing the time away from parents before marrying increased individualism, self-sufficiency, and changes in attitudes about families.   In contrast, an earlier study by Williams, cited below, shows no significant gender differences in sex role attitudes as a result of non-family living. This contradiction between the two studies presented a gap in research on how perception of sex roles can affect or be affected by non-family living, which my paper set out to better understand and investigate. Specifically, my paper set out to better understand the difference between sampling methodologies and their results in studies on the perception of sex roles.