

# Annotated Bibliographies

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September 2008



CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

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## Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a great tool to help scholarly writers move from the research to the drafting phase of a writing project, particularly when managing a large number of sources. A *bibliography* is an alphabetized list of sources relevant to a particular area of inquiry or research question; an *annotated bibliography* goes beyond merely giving the citation information for the sources to provide the reader with more information about the content of those sources. The content information is called the *annotation*.

### *Types of annotation*

There are at least two different kinds of annotated bibliographies: those that are *summative* and those that are *evaluative*. Length of annotations can also vary, from approximately 150-word paragraphs to one- or two-page annotations. Occasionally some are designed with shorter annotations. If writing an annotated bibliography for a class, be sure to check with the instructor to determine which type of annotation is required for the assignment you are completing, and the preferred length required.

**Summative annotations** provide the reader with a solid sense of the content of the article or book being annotated. They are similar to abstracts, but usually are a little more detailed and convey more aspects of the arguments being presented. Summative annotations are not as long or detailed as *summaries*, however, which are generally longer essay assignments in which the writer is representing all the main points of an article.

### **Sample summative annotation:**

Kemp, F. (1998). Computer-mediated communication: Making nets work for writing instruction. In J.R. Galin & J. Latchaw (Eds.), *The dialogic classroom* (pp. 133-150). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Fred Kemp, associate professor of English at Texas Tech University is the author of this early investigation of the potential uses of network computing in teaching writing.<sup>1</sup> Opening with a historical discussion of the perceived impact of the microcomputer on writing pedagogy, he notes that while machines lack the natural language capability to become graders of student papers, they have

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<sup>1</sup> In the opening of this annotation, we introduce the author and his qualifications, linking to an overview of the article he has written.

had great impact as network tools useful for facilitating peer review in writing instruction.<sup>2</sup> Through a series of examples dating back to Trent Batson’s use of networked computers to enable deaf students to communicate in writing with each other at Gallaudet University in 1985, Kemp traces the impact of applied networking on collaborative learning theories such as Kenneth Bruffee, Thomas Kuhn, and Karen Burke LeFevre.<sup>3</sup> He further recalls his own work developing “The Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment” [DIWE] software for writing instruction at the University of Texas in the mid-1980s, which was a precursor to the computer-mediated communication [CMC]-based instruction that emerged in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Giving examples of student responses to networked writing and peer review assignments collected as part of the Computer-Based Writing Project at Texas Tech in the 1990s, Kemp concludes by arguing that “societal changes in information access and communication will require profound changes in the classroom and in the way most people learn” (p. 149).<sup>5</sup>

**Evaluative annotations** include both a description and a critical assessment of the article or book being annotated. They are designed to give the reader a sense of the quality of the source and the argumentative position of the author relative to others in the field. Some evaluative annotations are focused specifically on how the source responds or contributes to a particular research question or area of inquiry in the field. Consideration of methodology and how data were gathered are often a part of an evaluative annotation. These types of annotations may be stand-alone entries, or they may be comparative, referencing the other entries to give a total picture of how different articles on the topic are in conversation with each other.

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<sup>2</sup> Here we characterize the intent and purpose of the article, giving the main idea (or thesis) advanced.

<sup>3</sup> Key examples and central figures cited are noted here as a means of summarizing critical content found in the article.

<sup>4</sup> Kemp’s discussion of his own involvement in the development of instructional technology is related to his historical account of how network computing became instrumental in realizing the previously mentioned educational theories.

<sup>5</sup> This sentence provides further information about the content of the article and ends with a quoted passage documenting Kemp’s final conclusion about the impact of technology on the writing classroom.

**Sample evaluative annotation (adapted from the summative example above):**

Kemp, F. (1998). Computer-mediated communication: Making nets work for writing instruction. In J.R. Galin & J. Latchaw (Eds.), *The dialogic classroom* (pp. 133-150). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Fred Kemp, associate professor of English at Texas Tech University is the author of this early investigation of the potential uses of network computing in teaching writing. Opening with a historical discussion of the perceived impact of the microcomputer on writing pedagogy, he notes that while machines lack the natural language capability to become graders of student papers, they have had great impact as network tools useful for facilitating peer review in writing instruction. Through a series of examples dating back to Trent Batson's use of networked computers to enable deaf students to communicate in writing with each other at Gaullaudet University in 1985, Kemp traces the impact of applied networking on collaborative learning theories such as Kenneth Bruffee, Thomas Kuhn, and Karen Burke LeFevre. He further recalls his own work developing "The Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment" [DIWE] software for writing instruction at the University of Texas in the mid-1980s, which was a precursor to the computer-mediated communication [CMC]-based instruction that emerged in the 1990s. Giving examples of student responses to networked writing and peer review assignments collected as part of the Computer-Based Writing Project at Texas Tech in the 1990s, Kemp concludes by arguing that "societal changes in information access and communication will require profound changes in the classroom and in the way most people learn" (p. 149). Although now dated, his 1998 argument was eerily prescient and the article is useful in establishing an historical account of early applications of network technology on writing

pedagogy.<sup>6</sup> As such, this article would be helpful in a study tracing the initial impact of computers in the writing classroom as teachers first sought to put network technology to use.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Uses of annotated bibliography***

Annotated bibliographies can be invaluable in the research process, especially when working with large numbers of sources over a long period of time. It is very difficult (if not impossible) to recall details about every source on a given topic. Well-written annotations can help crystallize key information presented in each article or book, preserving it in a format that can be easily accessed and revisited at any stage of the writing process.

An annotated bibliography can be created in response to a specific research question, or it might represent exploratory research on a broader topic at an earlier stage of the research process. Writing about each source individually helps clarify and situate the perspectives of different scholars and their approaches to a given topic. In this way, the annotated bibliography can serve as the basis of a review of literature; it functions as the “nuts and bolts” of the research, laying out different themes and positions that have emerged about the topic in the literature of the field.

### ***Format of annotated bibliography entries (in APA style)***

The basic format of each entry in an annotated bibliography is simple: begin with a complete reference list citation in correct APA format, and follow that citation with the annotation. Use hanging indent for the whole paragraph, just as you would for the citation alone, and double-space the entire entry.

**The following example illustrates the format for an annotated bibliography entry:**

Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

This book by Ira Shor, a professor of English at the City University of New

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<sup>6</sup> In this sentence, we move from summary of the content of the article to an evaluative statement assessing its purpose and value, advancing a critique based on its age while noting some strengths that make it useful for contemporary research.

<sup>7</sup> The addition here of a final evaluative statement suggests why the article will be of interest to a researcher pursuing a particular research project.

York, offers new pedagogical methods of “critical teaching for social change.”<sup>8</sup> The author, who teaches composition and basic writing courses, integrates his own classroom experiences with a discussion of Freirean and other pedagogical theories.<sup>9</sup> Beginning with the politics of socialization in the education system, Shor makes a case for empowering (as opposed to traditional) education, defined as “a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change” (p. 15).<sup>10</sup> Student participation, he argues, is a key element of this model, and it is up to the teacher to foster positive feelings about the class and invite participation from the students. This can be achieved by a technique called “problem-posing,” in which the teacher generates a dialogue in class rather than delivering information in a lecture format.<sup>11</sup> Problem-posing is especially helpful as a strategy in a multicultural classroom, since it underscores the impact of situated learning, in which students establish their own vantage point and knowledge in relation to the course material.<sup>12</sup> By discussing student resistance in terms of actual classroom examples, Shor applies pedagogical theory to his own experiences and makes the application of Freire’s ideas clear in a contemporary American educational context.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Here we establish the identity of the author and his qualifications, as well as offering a key phrase quoted from the text to establish the main idea conveyed in the text.

<sup>9</sup> This sentence serves as a description of the methods and theories used in the text.

<sup>10</sup> By incorporating a direct quote, we establish the main point Shor is making and link that to a discussion of the content of the book.

<sup>11</sup> Here we introduce a key term central to his argument, defining it and relating it to the overall point Shor is making in the text.

<sup>12</sup> This sentence offers insight into a potential application of Shor’s pedagogy, in this case its use specifically in the multicultural classroom.

<sup>13</sup> In this final sentence, Shor’s methodology is explained in a description of the purpose and particular value of the text. This is a summative annotation; an evaluative one would be followed by more specific statements addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the book, as well as its specific relevance to a particular research topic or project.

### ***Organization of annotated bibliography entries***

Entries in annotated bibliographies are typically placed in alphabetical order; however, it is also possible to organize entries according to a theme or particular aspect of the topic. This is most frequently done in cases of longer annotated bibliographies involving many sources, and can be a really helpful way to further organize or highlight the sources pertaining to different aspects of the research topic. Another way to think about this is as a longer annotated bibliography divided into a series of shorter ones, each with its own subheading focused on a theme or specific approach to the larger topic. Organizing an annotated bibliography in this way can make it very easy to develop a well-structured review of literature from the research you have done on a scholarly topic.



## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

### **Why did my instructor assign an annotated bibliography as part of my research project?**

The annotated bibliography is helpful in allowing you as the writer to organize and assess the scholarly research you have gathered on a topic. As you write an annotation for each source, you will gain a better understanding of what each article or book contributes to the knowledge about the topic, and how each source relates to the others you have read. By the time your annotated bibliography is complete, you will have developed your critical thinking about the topic and should find it easier to begin drafting your essay or thesis.

### **What is the difference between an *abstract* and an *annotation*? Can't I just cut and paste the library abstract into my annotated bibliography?**

An abstract is usually shorter than an annotation, and is really just a brief descriptive summary of an article or essay. Library abstracts are designed to let the reader know at a glance more about the content of an article; they are useful for a cursory appraisal but don't provide as much information about the argument being presented, nor do they evaluate the content of the work. Annotations are often more detailed and critical, allowing the reader to learn about the specific perspective of the author in relation to the topic and his or her authority to take a particular position. Cutting and pasting the library abstract would not be sufficient for an annotation, since it would not be as detailed and would not include critical evaluation of the work or specific relevance to your individual project topic.

### **Can I use software programs to create my annotated bibliography? Why should I consider doing that?**

The use of reference software programs is an optional way of storing bibliographic entries in a database format. While annotated (and other) bibliographies can also be created in a word processing program, there are certain advantages to building and storing bibliographic entries in database software programs like EndNote, RefWorks, or StyleWriter. Each of these programs allows the user to link complete reference information on a source to a list of keywords, an annotation, and/or notes fields in which you can enter specific and personalized information about the work and its relevance to your own area of inquiry. Over time, these programs can allow you to build a virtual "library" of references relevant to one or more research topics, and they can be recalled and accessed later as needed through specific keyword searches. When embarking on a lengthy research project like a dissertation, the ability to save annotated sources in a thematically retrievable way is invaluable in that it enables you to locate the sources most relevant to any aspect of the project you might be working on, as well as simultaneously recalling your own notes on the content of those sources.