

# How to Write an Annotated Bibliography

..... a practical handout

## What is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations in alphabetical order with a short paragraph beneath it which summarizes and evaluates the source. Additionally, you may be asked to reflect on the source or explain why it ties into your topic.

An annotated bibliography helps the writer learn more about their subject and assess its credibility. Many professors require an annotated bibliography before a large research paper. An annotated bibliography also helps your professor understand your thought processes regarding your topic.

The following will explain the steps for writing an annotated bibliography.

## Step 1: Find Sources

In order to begin your annotated bibliography, you need to decide on a topic. Then, you need to begin finding sources that fit with your topic. The library website is always the best place to start. You can start simple and search for general words or phrases. If you can't find any sources that match your topic, you might need to become more specific.

### Example:

- Topic:
  - *Prehistoric Irish Musical Instruments*
  
- Search ideas:
  - *Musical instruments*
  - *Prehistoric Ireland*
  - *Prehistoric Irish Musical Instruments*
  - *Loughnashade*

For more information about how to search for sources, you can refer to the Meriam Library webpage:  
<https://library.csuchico.edu/>

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## Step 2: Read Your Source

Once you find a few sources that fit with your topic, you need to begin reading them. Make sure to highlight anything important and take notes. This will help you write your summary.

For more information about how to read research articles, you can refer to our handout titled: “How to read a Research Article.”

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## Step 3: Cite Your Source

After reading your source, you need to write out the citation. APA, MLA, and Chicago are the most-used citation formats. Make sure to double-check which citation format your professor requires.

### Example (APA):

O’Dwyer, Simon. (2004). *Prehistoric Music of Ireland*. Tempus Publishing Ltd. Gloucestershire.

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## Step 4: Summarize

After you have read your source, you need to begin writing a summary. A summary should not contain any of your personal thoughts. It is only a brief paragraph about the information contained within your source.

To help you write a summary, you can ask yourself these questions:

- What is the author’s main point(s)?
- What other information is contained within this source that you may need in the future of writing your paper?

### Example:

*Prehistoric Music of Ireland* by Simon O’Dwyer (2004) provides information regarding Irish music instruments and their uses from the Bronze Age to modern times. O’Dwyer addresses recent attempts to reconstruct uncovered prehistoric instruments. These reconstructions allow researchers to play the instruments and develop a better understanding of their sound. The book also includes references to music and instruments through stories, written accounts, and artwork.

## Step 5: Assessment

For the assessment section, you need to do a bit more digging into your source beyond what is written. Many professors require you to include a few sentences about relevance and credibility.

### **Relevance:**

Relevance refers to how and why a source supports your topic. Depending on your professor's preference, you can write this in first person.

### **Example:**

O'Dwyer's book provides photographs, first-hand experience, and evidence about Irish musical instruments, which I can use in my essay. Upon finding this book, I became discouraged because it appeared like the topic was already written. However, this gave me the idea to expand my focus to comparing prehistoric and modern Irish musical instruments.

### **Credibility:**

Checking credibility is a good first step, and lets the reader know the source is reliable. If the source is of questionable credibility, you may consider finding another source.

Some questions you can ask yourself to help you write this section are:

- Where was this source published?
- Who is/are the author(s)?
- What are their credentials?

### **Example:**

O'Dwyer and his wife have been researching Irish musical instruments for over twenty-five years. They have presented at numerous universities and festivals and have played at concerts with the instrument reproductions.

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## Step 6: Extras

Depending on your professor, you might need to add more information to your annotated bibliography. They might want you to include:

- A description of your audience.
- A comparison of your source with the other sources in your annotated bibliography.

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### References

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