Creating an annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography provides a concise summary of each source and some assessment of its value and relevance. It is excellent preparation for carrying out independent research.

Annotated bibliography—its function

The process is not just a matter of listing possible sources. It also requires you to think critically. Consider your sources in terms of:

• what has already been written about their chosen topic and
• how your own research will fit into this.

As you examine each source, you will need to identify the issues and different perspectives of others. This will help you to develop a reasoned argument.

A good annotated bibliography will:

• allow you to keep track of your reading
• encourage you to think critically about the sources you are using in relation to your research area
• allow you, quite early on in the process, to become aware of possible concerns about using certain sources
• help you determine whether a source is of use to you in your research
• help you to justify your use of particular sources, both to your supervisor and to the IB examiner who will be reading your essay
• help you with the planning of your research, and ultimately save you time
• enable you to develop critical-thinking skills in selecting and evaluating source material.

TIP: The annotated bibliography is a planning tool to help you manage your research and time. It must not be included in the EE as an appendix.
How to compile an annotated bibliography

An annotated bibliography consists of:
• the bibliographic information
• the annotations (a concise summary of the source).

The annotations will vary in length depending on whether you are writing a summary of the source or analyzing it.

A summary should include:
1. a concise summary of the content and theme(s) of the source
2. a comment on the authority of the author
3. a comment on the purpose of the source
4. a comment on how this source might be useful.

Some examples

Biology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content/theme(s)</td>
<td>How crop management systems can affect the spread of coffee rust epidemics. The role of mathematical modelling supported by data from the field is discussed and new approaches to managing the coffee crop are suggested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s authority</td>
<td>The main author works at a government agricultural research station in Costa Rica and has published many articles in pest control, agriculture and mathematical modelling. Clearly a recognized scientific authority in the coffee-growing business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>To suggest novel ways of dealing with a major tropical agricultural disease through an integrated scientific approach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Usefulness                | • Takes a balanced look at benefits and difficulties of using mathematical models to predict changes in complex ecological systems.  
  • Considers the practical implications for the |
farmers who have to deal with the issues in the field.
- Suggests scientifically considered interventions.

### English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content/theme(s)</td>
<td>Ehrenreich attempts to ascertain whether it is currently possible for an individual to live on a minimum wage in America. Taking jobs as a waitress, a maid in a cleaning service, and a Walmart sales employee, the author summarizes and reflects on her work, her relationships with fellow workers and her financial struggles in each situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s authority</td>
<td>Ehrenreich is an experienced journalist, author and political activist. She has been publishing since the 1970s and has been active in a number of different fields, such as finance, health care and feminism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Ehrenreich gives a first-hand and critical insight into the everyday life of Americans at the “lower end” of the social spectrum, a world we don’t normally experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Usefulness                | Extremely useful:
- insight into America’s society as a whole
- gives those examples and details
- critical presentation from an outsider’s perspective
- a good example of “embedded journalism”. |

### History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content/theme(s)</td>
<td>Genocide and how it can be avoided, especially in the case of the Bosnian civil war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s authority</td>
<td>Journalist and author. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting, the George Polk Award for foreign reporting, the Selden Ring Award for investigative reporting, and a special Human Rights in Media Award from the International League for Human</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Rights

### Purpose
Collection of stories, accounts, articles of the Bosnian war.

### Usefulness
The source was useful in so far as it provided accounts of the Bosnian war and its aftermath. It is clearly an investigation into the causes of the civil war and genocide. It helped frame the conflict for me so that I could locate further articles and journal sources. The source was very informative as I try to understand the causes and consequences of genocide and why it occurs.

---

### Social and cultural anthropology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content/theme(s)</td>
<td>Ethnographic study of social marginalization in East Harlem. A focus on the economics of exclusion and the realities of life for low-level drug dealers within a community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s authority</td>
<td>Professor of anthropology who spent several years undertaking fieldwork with the community he was researching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>An ethnographic insight into the microeconomics of low-level drug dealing in an urban environment, paying particular attention to issues around the rise of poverty in urban areas, and the politics and economics of exclusion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Usefulness                | - Insight and access to the life of a group of marginalized people—a difficult undertaking.  
- Insight into the ethnographic method in practice, in terms of the challenges, rewards and ethical considerations.  
- Critical look at the role of the observer and the need for reflexivity. |