

Improving Information-Seeking Behaviors and Knowledge Bases for  
Thesis Students in the Applied Behavior Analysis Graduate Program and  
Students in the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Graduate Program

### **Video 7: Creating an Annotated Bibliography**

In this video, I want to explain what an annotated bibliography is, how one is constructed, and why you might find one useful. I will also talk about how to select appropriate materials and provide writing tips.

From the name, it's clear that bibliographic information is required, so plan on a full bibliography. The "annotated" part is the magic! In the annotation, one finds an evaluation of the cited source, observations about its accuracy, authority, pertinence, and bias. An annotated bibliography is a very useful research tool, one that many scholars compile for their own reference. It may include articles, books, chapters from books, other documents, or even media.

One of the benefits of creating annotated bibliographies is that it helps build critical thinking skills. Learning how to research is the first step in assessing and evaluating information. Building an annotated bibliography helps you learn how to determine the relevance and authority of a given resource.

So what is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150 words) description and evaluative paragraph which is called an annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

Annotations differ from abstracts. Abstracts are purely descriptive, non-evaluative summaries found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles or in periodical indexes, such as PsycINFO or MedLine.

Annotations are descriptive and critical. As an author, you provide your point of view and critique of the article or book. Annotations are concise and succinct.

How do you start?

First, you perform a literature review on your topic. You find and locate materials that look relevant to your topic. After careful examination, you select only those items that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic.

It is important to cite the items using the correct citation style, in this case, APA, and to provide as full a citation as possible so that the readers of your bibliography can find them.

Then you write a concise annotation of the item that summarizes the central themes or findings of the item. This involves several steps.

First, evaluate the background, or 'authority' of the author.

Second, identify the audience. Are you writing for other researchers, policymakers, practitioners, students, or community members?

Third, good annotated bibliographies provide a comparative analysis of the selected items. This requires you as the author to spend some time synthesizing the research to see what seems to work well together, where disagreements are found, and what are common themes and issues.

Finally, you will also include a sentence that explains the importance of this article for the reader to better understand the topic.

One of the hardest things to learn in writing an annotated bibliography is learning how to appraise the articles you must select. The initial appraisal addresses the author, his or her background, the

date the article or chapter was published, if it is a first or second edition, if the term has been revised, the publisher of the journal, and the type of journal in which the article was published.

Determine the qualifications of the author to write authoritatively on the subject. What degrees does the author hold, and from where? Where is he or she employed? What has the author published so far? Much of this information is contained in the *Who's Who* for the author's field.

Search in a favorite database for works by this author and check the CITED BY button, or do a Forward Citation in ISI Web of Knowledge to determine how many times and in what context the author has been cited. ISI can tell you the rank of the journals the author has published in, which gives you insight into his or her level of scholarship. Keep track of the publications where your author has published.

Determine if you can what affiliations your author has. For example, your MD probably belongs to the AMA and may also belong to the College of Surgeons. If your author belongs to the Amalgamated Union of Wizards, Seers and Deep Thinkers, you may want to take a closer look at his other qualifications.

Note also the date of the publication from the title page or the back of the title page, or from the webpage. Who is the publisher and is the publisher typical for this field of study? What is the year and edition of the book or the journal or the webpage? Is the article a 'classic' and reprinted from a journal from twenty years ago?

There are two things to consider about early works. Classics show the emergence of a seminal theory or modality and may be important to include. However, early works may be superseded by more current knowledge on a disorder, intervention, law, or policy. Therefore, **BOTH** the classic and the updated article or book may be important to include to show scope or changes over time in the thinking on the topic.

When you get your hands on the article or book, look for the author's research question or research statement. This is found in the introduction and the conclusion of an article or chapter.

Look for key terms and phrases in the research question or statement.

For books, read the table of contents and the index to determine what the book covers. The index is a good way to find and track key terms and phrases throughout the book and see how the author incorporates those ideas into his or her research.

Read both the introduction and preface to determine what the author's purpose was in writing the book. For articles, read the abstract. Check the bibliography for the dates of the sources cited, and look for prominent names in the field among the references.

Also look at how the article or chapter is organized. What are the titles of the different sections? What is emphasized in the section headings or subheadings? Pay attention to the opening sentence(s) of each paragraph. The opening or topic sentence is where authors state their main point in the paragraph. Also, look for summary paragraphs within a section. The summary paragraph often summarizes all or part of the argument the author is building in support of his or her research thesis.

Important words to look for are 'reporting' words. Reporting words are found in such phrases as "Snodgrass **accounts for** this anomaly" or "Aardvark **determines that** the results are valid" or "the Smith **describes** the findings **as** irrefutable evidence."

Try to determine the target audience for the work. Read a few paragraphs at several places in the work. Is the work based on fact or opinion? Are the arguments logical and well-supported by other scholars in the field? Is your professor familiar with the author's work and does he or she have an opinion about it? Determine whether the work is primary or secondary source material. For example, the letters of Marie Curie to her husband Pierre are primary sources; a text that discusses their collaborative relationship and cites the letters is a secondary source.

A good cross-check on your research is to look up your book in a reviewing source like *Bowker's Books in Print*, *Choice*, *Book Review Index Online*, and *Book Review Digest*. For articles, you can sometimes find letters written in response to an article by searching in the same journal. You can always look in *Ulrich's Guide to Periodical Literature* for a description of the journal.

At this point, you have information about your author, the date of the publication, edition or revision, the publisher, and, for articles, the journal title. You should be able to identify the intended audience, the breadth and depth of coverage of the subject, the author's skill in writing and presenting information, and what other critics have said about the work.

After you have determined that the article, book, or chapter is worth keeping, then you move on to the next stage. In this case you determine

1. for whom the author is writing,
2. if the article is objective in its presentation,
3. how well the author covers his or her topic,
4. in what style is the article written – opinion, scientific, technical, lay terms, and
5. finally, how successful is the evaluation of the program, law, or policy.

It is also at this point that you make a decision about your audience and why you are writing this annotated bibliography. Are you writing for other students, for academics, for practitioners, for parents? Are you writing to convince readers of a particular stance or to inform them about the scope of a topic? It is at this time that you choose a writing style.

A well-written annotated bibliography is like any other well-written paper. It is linear and well organized, with clearly presented main points. The writing is clear and easy to read. The vocabulary level is appropriate to the audience. If you cannot explain a complex excerpt from the article, do not use it. Take a moment and put it into understandable terms.

Here are some other writing tips:

- Keep sentences short and vary the lengths. A sentence that runs past 23 words is a long sentence. When you use a long sentence, place a short one before and after it.
- Prefer the simple sentence to the complex sentence.
- Use familiar words.
- Avoid unnecessary words.
- Use the active voice, not passive.
- Don't write like you talk.
- Use terms your reader can picture.
- Tie in with your reader's experience.
- Make full use of variety.
- Write to express, not impress.

Now you are equipped to write a summary of the theme and a description of the scope of the book or article. You will include your evaluation of the author's expertise, the intended audience, its pertinence to other works you have reviewed, and the relevance of this work to the research topic. Be sure to cite the work correctly using APA style. For more about the APA citation style, see our video *APA Citation Style* or view the guidelines at <http://www.apastyle.org/>.

Here is a sample annotation.

Shern, D. L., Giard, J., Robinson, P., & et al. (2003). *Evaluation of Florida's Medicaid prepaid mental health plans: Year 6 report* (Agency for Health Care Administration Report Series No. 220-42). Tampa, FL: The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.

Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) began implementing managed behavioral health care in March 1996. For the past six years, the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI), has conducted a series of integrated, multi-method evaluation projects to assess the effects of the Prepaid Mental Health Plan (PMHP) demonstrations on access, cost, quality, and outcomes of services relative to alternative managed care arrangements and to the traditional financing arrangements used in the rest of the state. This report presents the findings from both the demonstration project in the AHCA area 1, the Florida Panhandle region, and the findings from year 6 in the continuing evaluation of the PMHP operating in AHCA Area 6, the Tampa Bay region. This project is important in showing how the PMHP works in both rural and urban areas of the state in the provision of services and in reduction of barriers to utilization and access of services.

Note the citation is in APA style.

Also note that the citation includes the series information (Agency for Health Care Administration Report Series No. 220-42). This is important information since it lets the reader know that there are other reports that may provide historical or more current information about mental health services in Florida.

The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, as the publisher, has been researching behavioral health issues in Florida since 1967 and is a recognized national leader in behavioral health services and policy research.

Also see how the scope of the project was described. It is a six-year long project, it started in 1996, and it spans two large health service regions in Florida.

It is also written for persons who are interested in behavioral health services, especially in financing and services delivery.

Finally note that the concluding statement says why this project is important.

As I mentioned earlier, the reason to write an annotated bibliography is to engage your critical thinking skills, the first step in assessing and evaluating information. Writing annotated bibliographies is a good first step in learning how to critically evaluate the universe of knowledge in your discipline.

You may think an annotated bibliography is not part of a research toolbox. However, creating an annotated bibliography of the pertinent works you plan to use for your thesis or major paper does help you place all of the materials you have collected into a coherent framework and helps show the relationships among your major concepts, theories, methods, and expected outcomes.

For more information or assistance in crafting a literature review or tips in creating an annotated bibliography, please contact your local librarian at [FMHILibrary@usf.edu](mailto:FMHILibrary@usf.edu)

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