

WRITING AN ANNOTATION

An annotation is much more than a summary! Your annotation should begin with a complete bibliographic citation using the style manual of your, or your instructor's, choice. This is followed by the annotation. In addition to providing a succinct summary of the information provided in the source, the contents of the annotation should answer the questions listed below. They are of three types, descriptive, critical and comparative. The questions here are not suggesting an organization for your annotation! They are trying to guide you to carefully, thoughtfully consider your information sources.

DESCRIPTION Much of the information required to answer these questions should be found in the individual item itself with careful reading of some parts you probably usually disregard, such as prefatory remarks, introductions, footnotes, etc. Some questions apply only to certain formats. In the case of periodical articles, it may be necessary to consult an entire issue, and you should also consider finding the homepage for the periodical.

What kind of work is it? Book? Chapter? Essay?
Popular magazine article? Scholarly journal article?
Webpage?

Who is/are the author(s)? You need more than their names here! Consider background, position, qualifications. If there are many, as there might be with a webpage, how would you characterize them as a group?

What does this source cover? What is the scope, depth, level, extent of the information provided? What kind of information are you getting? This is your chance to demonstrate your skills at summarizing!

What was the author's stated purpose or motivation? Why did she write the article or book, or in do the research, or contribute to the webpage?

Who is the intended audience? Could be scholars or researchers in a discipline, the general public, workers in an industry, professionals in a field, people with a shared passion/interest, of a certain age, or political persuasion. This may take some real thinking.

Who is the publisher or sponsor? This is especially relevant if the information source is related to an organization of some sort. Find out something about them. Find their webpage, mission statement, purpose.

What is the basis for the research or data reported? This would include things like types of information used, methodology, problem statements, limitations.

What kind of documentation is there? Look at the different information resources cited, their dates, formats, and quality as well as quantity. Does it include a complete review of the literature?

CRITICISM These questions are intended to guide you to think very critically about your sources. You may have additional questions or critical comments to include in your annotation.

What aspects of the subject are emphasized? Is the author presenting one particular point of view?

What conclusions are drawn? Issues raised? Are the conclusions drawn justified or adequately substantiated?

Can you detect any biases or fallacies in the arguments or conclusions presented?

Is anything clearly lacking? Do you feel like you have

questions about what is or is NOT stated? Are you left feeling confused? Are there gaps or holes?

Consider the information you found, or didn't find, about the authors/sponsor/publisher. What does it lead you to believe about the validity and authority of the information provided?

Are there any other qualities of the source, like style, organization, or graphics, which affect its usefulness?

COMPARISON This where you consider your choices. Look at all your sources as a group. WHY did you choose these particular books, articles, web pages for your research? How do they work together?

How does this particular information source compare with or relate to the others you have read on the topic?

How useful was this work to you in your research? What role did it play? Is it a primary source or secondary source in your research?

What makes this source important to your research? Why include it?

Sample Annotations

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT THESE ANNOTATIONS

YOUR annotations will be longer. These examples were written without the context of a particular assignment. They, therefore, lack comments related to their value in such a context. **YOU**, however, would need to have such comments in your own annotations. You would also have more comparative statements to make, statements relating one information source to another in your annotated bibliography.

In some cases, too, your instructor will be asking you to explain where and how you found each particular item. For example, for the first item listed below, I would add a sentence like this: “*I found this book in OSCAR by doing a keyword search under tiananmen square.*” For the 2nd one, it might be: “I found this article using the Historical Abstracts database and searching under the phrase, “tiananmen square.” The 3rd one, a webpage, you would say what web search tool you used, as in, “*I found this webpage using Infomine and searching under the keywords tiananmen square.*”

APA:

Simmie, S. & Nixon, B. (1990). *Tiananmen Square*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

MLA:

Simmie, Scott, and Bob Nixon. *Tiananmen Square*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1990. Print.

This book is a combination of eyewitness account or diary and interviews conducted in 1988 with various Chinese intellectuals and artists. The authors are Canadian journalists who have worked for China Central Television and spent long periods in China. They were working on a book on the experiences of China's artists and intellectuals during the many upheavals and purges under 40 years of Communist rule when the student movement leading up to the June 4 massacre began. Interspersing the 1988 interviews with the description of the Spring, 1989 uprising demonstrates how Chinese history shaped the events of April-June, 1989. The authors give very little personal comment but let the chronicle of events, interviews, and translations of key documents and speeches do the speaking. This is not a scholarly work, but it has more authority and authenticity than *Time Magazine's* “Massacre in Beijing”, and a great deal more depth and substance than Salisbury's *Tiananmen Diary*.

APA:

Esherrick, J. W. & Wasserstron, J. N. (1990). Acting out democracy: political theater in modern China. *Journal of Asian Studies* 49: 835-65. Retrieved from <http://www.aasianst.org/>

MLA:

Esherrick, Joseph W. and Jeffrey. N. Wasserstron. "Acting Out Democracy: Political Theater in Modern China." *Journal of Asian Studies* 49.4 (1990): 835-65. JSTOR. Web. 14 Sept. 2011.

This scholarly journal article provides an uncommon interpretation of the events of April-June, 1989 in Beijing. The authors are history professors at American universities with recent firsthand experience in China. They base their article on research, personal observation and the written and pictorial records of events. Their stated goal is to create a framework in which to interpret the events that will place them within the context of Chinese political history and permit comparison with recent similar events in Eastern Europe. The conclusion drawn is that the events of April-June, 1989, in Beijing were not related to Western participatory democracy but rather to traditional Chinese forms and ideas and are characterized as political theater. As such, they are full of symbols and scripts with unique Chinese historical bases.

APA:

CNN. (2001). Tiananmen revisited 1989-2001. Retrieved from: <http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/tiananmen/index.html>

MLA:

CNN. *Tiananmen Revisited 1989-2001*. Cable News Network. 2001. Web. 14 Feb. 2006.

This site was created by CNN to commemorate the June, 1989 massacre of student protestors by the Chinese Army in Tiananmen Square. It provides links to news stories about the controversial “Tiananmen papers,” a Who’s Who of Chinese government officials involved at the time, access to a few relevant news stories since 1989, and, most significantly, several videos, available in different media formats, photos and audios that constitute eyewitness accounts of the events at the time.