

Writing an Annotation

AN ANNOTATION IS A LOT 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 general, the contents of the annotation should answer the questions listed below. They are of two types, general description and critical comment. However, the relevance of particular questions will vary somewhat depending on the topic and other parameters your instructor sets for the bibliography.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION The information required to answer these questions should be found in the item itself with careful reading of some parts you probably usually disregard, such as prefatory remarks, introductions, etc. Be sure, also, to scan the Table of Contents for a special section with information about the authors/contributors of multi-authored works. Some questions apply only to certain formats. In the case of periodical articles, it may be necessary to consult an entire issue to answer some questions. If you retrieved the article online, you should also consider finding the homepage for the periodical. This can be hard to do using a search engine. Try looking the periodical up by title on www.publist.com instead to find its publisher and the url for the homepage. One of our databases, Ulrichsweb, gives short descriptions of periodicals and will also lead you to its official webpage.

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

Who is/are the author(s)? Consider background, position, qualifications. If there are many, as there might be with a webpage, how would you characterize them as a group?

What was the author's stated purpose or motivation in writing the article or book, or in doing the research, or in contributing to the webpage?

Who is the intended audience? This includes scholars in a discipline, the general public, workers in an industry, professionals in a field, people with a shared passion/interest or of a certain age group or political persuasion.

Who is the publisher or sponsor? This is especially relevant if the information source is related to an organization of some sort.

Are there any significant attachments, appendices, statistics, data, images, weblinks, etc. included?

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

What is the scope of the documentation? Look at the different information resources cited, their dates, formats, and quality as well as quantity.

CRITICAL COMMENT Answering these questions will require some critical thinking on your part. Comparing the different sources of information you have found on the same topic usually helps.

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?

If information about the authors/sponsor/publisher was difficult to find or very limited, what does this lead you to believe about the validity and authority of the information provided?

How effectively is the information presented? Are you left feeling confused? Are there gaps or holes?

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

Is the work functioning as a primary or secondary source in your research?

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?

Sample Annotations

IMPORTANT NOTE 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 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 intute and searching under the keywords tiananmen square.”

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

This book is a combination of eye-witness 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*.

Esherick, J. W. & Wasserstron, J. N. (1990, November) "Acting out democracy: political theater in modern China." *Journal of Asian Studies*, 49, 835-865.

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.

CNN. (2001) *Tiananmen Revisited 1989-2001*. Retrieved February 14, 2006, from <http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/tiananmen/index.html>

This cite 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.