

WRITING AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

From *Writing Across the Curriculum* by Sandra Nagy

Why write an annotated bibliography?

You can discover what your source contains (analysis).

You can discover how best to use that information in your paper (organization).

You can discover how to restate your topic into a “working” thesis (purpose).

Rules to follow:

Take your sources one at a time.

Answer the questions in COMPLETE SENTENCES.

The first 3 questions:

What is the main, or most significant idea of this source?

What is the author trying to do (purpose)?

Who do you think is the author’s intended audience?

Combine the Answers:

Example: Smith focuses on the dropping illiteracy levels among school children, categorizing socioeconomic levels, racial groups, and parents’ educational background. Aiming at a general audience, Smith attempts to convince his readers that most children do poorly in school because their parents don’t work with them in home study sessions.

The next two questions:

What parts of the subject does the source emphasize or de-emphasize?

What assumptions does the author make about the topic or audience?

Again, you combine the answers:

Example: The author emphasizes that parents need to be more involved in their children’s education and assumes that these parents have the time, the expertise, and the inclination to do so.

The final three questions:

Is there any bias or slant in the source?

Are there obvious omissions that seem important to the ideas being discussed?

Does the evidence clearly support the author’s main points?

The last sentences:

Example: While Smith’s data supports his position, his solutions seem too simplistic and very general. Because he ignores the busy schedules, as well as the attitudes and expectations of some parents, his “just do it” advice doesn’t seem likely to change the situation.

Extra Tips:

Write SHORT paragraphs.

Combine answers where possible.

Have 5-8 sentences that accurately describe the information and ideas from each source in your bibliography.

Use an MLA type Works Cited page with a paragraph of analysis for each source.

Last Points:

Use alphabetical order.

Double space everything.

Leave two double-spaces between sources.

MLA Annotated Bibliography Examples

Cook, Sybilla. Instruction Design. New York: Garland, 1986. This book provides an annotated bibliography of sources concerning instructional patterns for research libraries. Written for an academic audience, the author provides information on how such a bibliography can be used. Although it does not provide information on how to compile an annotated bibliography, the book proves a good source for examples.

Harmon, Robert. "Elements of Bibliography." American Scholar 65 (1989): 24-36. Although this article from a scholarly journal does not focus on annotated bibliographies, the author does a superior job of indicating the reason and process of general bibliography. Harmon writes this text for librarians who must focus on detailing books. The bibliography for this text is annotated and provides a good source of examples.

Mitchell, Jason. "PMLA Letter." 1991. 23 May 1996.

<<http://10/28/2008/sunset.backbone.olemiss.edu/~jmitchel/plma.htm>>. Mitchell protests the "pretentious gibberish" of modern literary critics in his letter to PMLA. He argues that "Eurojive" is often produced by English professors to show that their status is equal to that of math and science faculty. His sense of humor makes this letter a great read.

Beebe, Maurice. Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce. New York: New York University Press, 1964. This is a fascinating study of the writer's dual identity as artist and as individual. The source seems good for ideas about objectifying intensely personal experiences.

Cassill, R.V. Writing Fiction. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975. This book is of exceptional quality. Principles and technique as well as concepts are illustrated throughout by referencing the short stories reprinted in Section Two. Original ideas for overcoming writer's block are covered in Chapter 4. "Finger Exercises" with specific instructions on how to imitate other writers is also discussed. Chapter 5, "Notebooks and Lists," parallels the writer's notebook with the artist's sketchbook and offers suggestions for making the notebook an incubator of the imagination.

Engle, Paul, ed. On Creative Writing. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1966. This is a collection of high quality articles, including Engle's introductory piece garnered from his years as the driving force behind the Iowa Workshop. Appended short stories support the essays, which include ideas about poetry, the novel, drama, and non-fiction.

Hildick, Wallace. Thirteen Types of Narrative: A Practical Guide on How to Tell a Story. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1970. This book is a lucid demonstration of the inseparable relationship between form and content as the author narrates the "basic story situation" from thirteen different points of view.

Aaron, Jane E., ed. The Little, Brown Compact Handbook. 3rd ed. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publications Inc., 1998. This handbook is a highly useful and cogently organized style guide with tabbed sections on process writing, clarity, grammar, punctuation, form, research, specialized writing, and several documentation styles. The comprehensive index aids in the quick and easy location of topics.

MLA Annotated Bibliography Examples II

Kintz, Linda. "The Sanitized Spectacle: What's Birth Got to Do with It? Adrienne Kennedy's A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White." Theatre Journal 44 (1992): 67-86. In a heavily theoretical article, Kintz draws on critics and theorists including Kristeva to address the issue of "female specificity" (particularly the references to bleeding and miscarriage) in Kennedy's play. This "female specificity" disrupts the cultural norms that choose to ignore certain aspects of "bloody femininity," instead constructing women like Charlotte (Bette Davis's character in Now, Voyager) asexual, "pure, abstracted mother *figure[s]*" (75). Kintz relates this to "the 'privilege of indifference' to legitimacy," but never really defines what she means by this phrase.

Said, Edward W. "The World, the Text, and the Critic." The World, The Text and the Critic.

Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983. 31-53. Said argues that texts are "enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society" (35) and that language, or a text, has a specific situation.(35) This conclusion means that texts do not have limitless interpretations (39). One other interesting point Said makes is that discourse is not a democratic exchange as some describe it. Rather, "texts are fundamentally facts of power, not of democratic exchange"; discourse is "usually like the unequal relation between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed" (45,48). Words are a part of the world and so are associated with power, authority and force. As an example, Said uses the exchange between Stephen Dedalus and the dean of students. Their worldliness means texts are representative of the reigning institutions; critics' jobs should be to expos[e] things that otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine" (53).

Shinn, Thelm J. "Living the Answer:" The Emergence of African American Feminist Drama." Studies in the Humanities 17 (1990): 149-159. In addition to plays by Hansberry, Childress, and Shange, the article discusses Kennedy's plays. The focus on strong female characters by these playwrights shows the gender tensions within black society. According to Shinn, Kennedy, by emphasizing "the multiplicity of the inner self," shows that these tensions must be "confronted internally" and then "integrated" (157). Shinn notes that Kennedy has shifted to an expressionist form to make these points (as opposed to the more realistic forms of Hansberry and Childress.) I found the points made in this article to be fairly obvious and not very helpful.

Sollors, Werner. "Owls and Rats in the American Funnyhouse: Adrienne Kennedy's Drama." American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography 63 (1991): 507-32. Sollors summarizes seven of Kennedy's plays, paying particular attention to their imagery, especially the animal imagery. He draws from her autobiography to explicate the text of her plays, explaining what associations she had with some of the images. Sollors provides a good analysis of the structure of Funnyhouse, saying that the repetition and the imagery provide a clear structure with three major rhetorical units: the "returning father," the "Roman ruins," and the "African saviour" (515). These units create a "rhythm...that deepens the themes of conflictual heritage, failed self-recognition, mission, sacrifice, decline, murder, and suicide without resolving these issues" (516). This is a good introductory essay, but not an in depth discussion of any one idea. Funnyhouse is discussed in the most detail.

Tener, Robert L. "Theatre of Identity: Adrienne Kennedy's Portrait of the Black Woman." Studies in Black Literature 6.2 (1975): 1-5. Tener focuses on the owl imagery in The Owl Answers and describes the possible associations of the owl from legend and myth. The character's internal struggle for identity is externalized through the presentation of the owl on stage. Among other

things, the owl has been associated with non-Christians, witches, and the female domestic arts (Athena); its call has been considered the call of death and the voice of a woman calling for her child who died in childbirth (2). Tener argues that “what the black woman receives from her American culture helps to confuse her identity” and that the “historical and literary past” of her white father provides She with “no meaning of solace” (3-4). Based on what Kennedy told Diamond, this conclusion seems questionable, because Kennedy said she felt part of a community of writers, including the dead, English ones.

Zinman, Toby Silverman. “‘In the presence of mine enemies’: Adrienne Kennedy’s An Evening with Dead Essex.” Studies in American Drama, 1945-Present 6 (1991): 3-13. Zinman analyzes the play in terms of “presence” and absence” of the characters, but as he says, not in as complex a manner as they are used to in the theories of Lacan, Saussure, and Derrida. He contends that the real subject of the play is absent (Essex) and that Kennedy has not found “a satisfying way to present absence on stage” in this play (12). In particular, according to Zihman, Kennedy’s use of realism limits the play to the “socially possible,” which are the same “forces the play intensely opposes” (8). The article was interesting, but I’m still not sure what a satisfactory absence would be.