

Annotating Sources, Paraphrasing, Summarizing, and Writing an Annotated Bibliography

Learning to annotate sources, paraphrase, summarize, and write an annotated bibliography will help you to become a more active reader, which will improve your writing over time.

Annotating Sources

Annotation is a written conversation between you and the writer in which you actively respond to the text. Pretend you are talking to the writer as you read. This exercise will help you to find connections between ideas in the text and ideas in other sources. It will also help you to form questions that could become paper topics. Remember, like any other skill, you must practice in order to improve.

- 1) Read a little more slowly than usual. Really try to absorb what the author is saying.
- 2) As you read, look for items that are interesting, significant, or which raise questions. Make notes or comments as follows:
 - Use stars, circles, arrows, lines, highlighting, or other meaningful symbols to mark these things as you read. Assign different colors to elements (pink for questions, yellow for main points, orange for connecting ideas, etc.). Use arrows and lines to show related ideas in the text.
 - Write notes about the text in the margins (e.g., What does this mean? What is the author trying to say? I do not understand this part. Look this up.).
 - Note where you disagree with the writer.
 - Rewrite a line of text in your own words to aid understanding, if necessary.
 - Circle any vocabulary words that are unfamiliar. Look up and note the definitions in the margin.
 - Make connections with the text (e.g., This makes me think of . . .).
- 3) If you do not want to write in the book, use sticky notes that can be transferred to another sheet of paper later. Or, use notebook paper with one column, for text and another for corresponding notes.
- 4) Now, go back and look at the marks and think about the connections found and questions raised. Why is that line interesting? What is the author trying to do?

This process will take time, but it is important because it will help you effectively use sources in a paper.

Paraphrasing and Summarizing

Two of the main ways writers incorporate sources are paraphrasing and summarizing. These techniques are similar but distinct in important ways, as illustrated by this chart:

PARAPHRASING	SUMMARIZING
Focuses on a specific passage	Provides a broad overview of an entire work
Delivers same info more clearly and directly	Describes in your own words
Brings in details from the original	Conveys just the main ideas
Reinforces your analysis	Remains neutral and objective
Concerns texts only	Concerns both texts and visuals

Paraphrasing

When you paraphrase, you restate what an author says in your own words. Paraphrasing is useful when you need “detailed notes on specific sentences and passages but do not need the exact wording” (*MLA Handbook* 92-93). Since paraphrasing requires thought and attention to detail, it demonstrates that you understand the source.

When paraphrasing, **do**

- Use your own words and sentence structure.
- Restate all the main points in order.
- Introduce/frame the paraphrase.
- Cite the source.

When paraphrasing, **do not**

- Use the author’s words or phrasing.
- Use the author’s sentence structure.
- Include your own comments.

Summarizing

Whereas a paraphrase “uses roughly the same number of words as the original source to convey information,” a summary “condenses” the main ideas of a text (*A Writer’s Reference* 447). Generally, summaries reduce the original text by *at least* half, restating the writer’s subject, main idea, and the supporting details in your own words. Be careful not to interpret the writer’s ideas; just report them. (You may want to put your interpretations in the margin for future reference.) Also, do not **plagiarize**. Be sure to document the source being summarized. Here are some tips to follow:

- 1) Read the text carefully, condensing its main idea and supporting details without losing the author’s intent.
- 2) Write a sentence that states the main idea **in your own words**.
- 3) Next, write a few sentences that give the supporting details, also in your own words.
- 4) Now, put all the sentences together using transition words (*A Writer’s Reference* 56-58) and good verbs (*A Writer’s Reference* 189-92).
- 5) Finally, cite the summary and double check for plagiarism.
 - Remember, changing one or two words does not constitute *using your own words*. Copying the sentence structure is too close to quoting to be academically honest. If you put something in your own words, change the whole sentence.
 - Always introduce or “frame” a summary. An introduction demonstrates the significance of your subject and provides context for your audience (See “Use signal phrases to integrate sources,” *A Writer’s Reference* 452-53).

More Tips:

- Remember that a summary = main idea + some supporting details.
- Do NOT include any of your own ideas.
- Quote and document the author’s key words or phrases if you use them.
- Make sure the author’s meaning of the writing is indicated in the summary.

Learning to effectively annotate, paraphrase, and summarize sources is essential to composing a thorough annotated bibliography.

Writing an Annotated Bibliography

The purpose of an **annotated bibliography** is to provide readers with a list of sources used when researching a topic for a research paper. Each entry will include the following:

- 1) Begin with a full citation for the source.
- 2) Have a summary of the source that will “inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the source cited” (Olin & Uris Libraries, Cornell University).
- 3) Be about 150 words long (or whatever the instructor expects).

In order to write the actual entry, follow these guidelines:

- 1) Choose the sources that best support the topic.
- 2) Write a citation for each source using the standard MLA format (or whatever format the instructor assigns).
- 3) Annotate in concise language, including the following:
 - Evaluation of the source, including the validity and credibility of its author.
 - Identification of the source’s intended audience.
 - If appropriate, comparison and contrast between this source and others in the list.
 - Description of how this source supports, explains, or is otherwise relevant to the topic.

Keep in mind that there are different ways to write an annotated bibliography. Always follow the instructor’s guidelines.

Example:

(From *A Writer’s Reference* 8th ed. 432-35.)

Gonsalves, Chris. “Wasting Away on the Web.” *eWeek.com*, 8 Aug. 2005,
<http://www.eweek.com/c/a/IT-Management/Wasting-Away-on-the-Web>.

In this editorial, Gonsalves considers the implications of several surveys, including one in which 61% of respondents said that their companies have the right to spy on them. The author agrees with this majority, claiming that it’s fine if his company chooses to monitor him as long as the company discloses its monitoring practices. He argues that “the days of internet freedom at work are justifiably finished,” adding that he would prefer not to know the extent of the surveillance. Gonsalves writes for *eWeek.com*, a publication focused on technology products. He presents himself as an employee who is comfortable with being monitored, but his job may be a source of bias. This editorial contradicts some of my other sources, which claim that employees want to know and should know all the details of their company’s monitoring procedures.

(Another example is found in the current edition of *A Writer’s Reference* on page 433.)