

The **Annotated Bibliography** Reconsidered

Overview

Many of us assign some form of bibliography as part of any larger research assignment. Taking cues from those thinking about interdisciplinary research, we might reconsider the genre of the annotated bibliography—and in doing so give our students a more effective research tool. Still, even reconceived, the annotated bibliography won't be as useful unless we also facilitate its use with staged checkpoints and classroom instruction. The payoff, we hope, will be greater clarity of argument when beginning to draft—and further sophistication of inquiry in the project as a whole.

Purposes

working document: part of a process of discovery

- record of reading (citation & summary)
- evaluation of scholarship (preliminary analysis)
- statement of direction & progress

Audiences

- researcher/student herself
- other students
- faculty (including imagined faculty readers outside of the course)

One of the key roles of the interdisciplinary researcher is to finesse “incompatible terminology” across different fields (Newell 2007). Therefore, a student might best aim for a general (though learned) audience.

Staging

A Single Bibliographic Entry

- citation + summary

☞ IN CLASS: make entry due; compare several summaries of a common text; demonstrate Zotero

The Drift Net

- include everything that seems remotely useful (citation + summary)
- a process ¶: student narrates initial connections she sees between sources

☞ IN CLASS: students share process and connections (small groups or select students)

Categorized

- sources re-presented in categories
- evaluation of scholarship (likely connected to kinds of categories)
- an intro/process ¶: student explains categories
- a coda ¶: what the categories reveal is still needed (addl. research)

☞ IN CLASS: create categories for a set of common texts (as model);
have students begin categorizing their Drift Net bibliography: troubleshoot & share
different approaches;
write in class: what's missing?

Some categorization schemes:

by theme	specific problems, issues, & questions around research topic
by perspective	discipline, theory/school of thought
	discipline: historical, economic, etc. (or interdisciplinary: women’s studies, cultural studies, sustainability) theory/school of thought: postcolonial, feminist, legal, _____, _____, _____
by chronology	by publication year; by periods being studied
by type [not necessarily library “material type”]	primary source, case study, data, analysis, historical background (“material types”: books, articles, audio, video)
by potential purpose in the student’s paper	definition of problem(s), specific data sources, model for method, model for style, etc.

Summarizing

A summary states the main ideas found in a source concisely and in your own words. Unlike a paraphrase, a summary does *not* present all the details, so it is generally as brief as possible. Summaries may boil down an entire book or essay into a single sentence, or they may take a paragraph or more to present the main ideas. (*Norton Field Guide to Writing*)

Identifying the Perspective of a Source

A meta-analysis of a source to identify its perspective is extremely challenging for students. It doesn’t help that most disciplinary sources (as well as ourselves who are steeped in those paradigms) often don’t identify perspective because of the assumption of a common understanding. So, practicing this process with your class may be the best way to introduce it. Some ways of uncovering perspectives in sources (many from Newell 2007):

- browse the author’s introduction
- scan author’s biographical sketch (looking for affiliations and department where she teaches)
- google the author(s) (looking for the same info)
- analyze the bibliography of the source (the majority of citations will tend to show the author’s disciplinary hand)
- in edited collections, analyze the tendency/perspective of all contributors
- note the library classification
- offer a shopping list of likely perspectives based on your own experience and triage of the assignment (e.g. feminist theory tends to look at issues in this way; postcolonial theory takes this view)—ideally part of your course since you can’t expect to teach each of these
- consider relaxing any expectations of perfect identification and terminology to allow students to describe the perspective using their own terms (i.e. “sources interested in issues with men and women” may substitute for “gender studies” or specific “feminist theory”)
- *assign a description of perspective as part of each bibliographic entry*

Examples (from Davidson's Center for Interdisciplinary Studies)

Science Non-Fiction: Science Non-fiction Writing in the Community (Cathryn Westra 2011)

- I. Introduction
- II. Science writing for the public: case studies
 - A. Cell phone use while driving
 - B. MMR vaccine/ autism controversy
 - C. Mozart effect
- III. Science writing for the public: thesis projects
 - A. Body image and eating behavior
 - B. Ozone and air pollution
- IV. Science non-fiction writing in the narrative form
- V. Additional resources for analysis of science writing challenges

Neuroscience: Assessing the effects of enhanced cholinergic activity on cell division in zebrafish (Kayla Swart 2010)

- I. Neurobiological Development
 - A. Motoneuron Morphology and Function
 - B. Islet Characterization
 - C. Cholinergic Signaling
- II. Environmental Context
 - A. Toxicology
 - B. Malathion
- III. Methodology
 - A. Zebrafish as Model Organisms
 - B. BrdU labeling (Neurogenesis)
 - C. TUNEL staining (Apoptosis)
 - D. Propidium Iodide (Necrosis)

History, Literature and the Law: The Rwandan Genocide (Kimberly Larkin 2010)

- I. Memory theory: Holocaust studies, memory of trauma, and narrative ethics
- II. Legal theory: legal narratives and the role of law in memory creation
- III. Postcolonial theory: subaltern criticism and the Rwandan genocide Rwandan genocide theory: contested narratives, competing histories
- IV. Perpetrator theory: explaining and portraying the accused and the damned
- V. Mzungu theory: humanitarianism in Rwanda and further afield
- VI. Gacaca reports (see attached charts)

Reference:

Carter, Michael. "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines." *College Composition and Communication* 58.3 (2007): 385-418. Print.

Newell, William H. "Distinctive Challenges of Library-Based Interdisciplinary Research and Writing: A Guide." *Issues in Integrative Studies* 25 (2007): 84-110. Print.

"Recent Projects and Annotated Bibliographies." Davidson College. *Center for Interdisciplinary Studies* Nov. 2010. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <<http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x10351.xml>>