# PREPARING AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### WHAT IS AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY?

An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents. Each citation is followed by a brief (usually about 150-200 words) descriptive and evaluative paragraph, which is called the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

## ISN'T THAT JUST AN ABSTRACT?

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Abstracts are the *purely descriptive* summaries often found at the beginning of scholarly journal articles. Annotations are descriptive *and* critical; they expose the author's point of view, clarity and appropriateness of expression, and authority, and comment on how the article helps understand the topic of your research better.

## I SEE YOUR POINT. SO HOW DO I MAKE ONE?

First, locate and record citations to books, periodicals, and documents that may contain useful information and ideas on your topic. Briefly examine and review the actual items. Then choose those works that provide a variety of perspectives on your topic. Then, cite the books and articles. This handout uses MLA style for formatting the bibliography.

Write a concise annotation that summarizes the central theme and scope of the book or article. Annotated bibliographies are written in third person.

In the paragraph, make sure to do the following:

- 1. Summarize its content
- 2. Highlight the purpose of the work
- 3. Evaluate the authority or background of the author
- 4. Explain any special or unique features about the material
- 5. Examine the strengths, weaknesses or biases in the material
- 6. Explain its relevance to the topic

Other factors that may be included in an annotation are commenting on the author's intended audience or comparing the article to other articles in your bibliography. These factors aren't always part of an annotation, but might be important for some research topics.

#### SAMPLE CITATION AND ANNOTATION

Way, Brian, "Formal Experiment and Social Discontent: Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*," *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1968, pp. 253-270. Brian Way, a scholar from the University College of Swansea in the '60s, argues that Heller's work, while new and improved with its rhetoric, is still obviously radical, anti-militarist and anti-capitalist in its message and preaches the necessity for justice and freedom. He posits that simply taking scenes and testing them on a radical or not radical basis will almost always lead one to the conclusion that the scene is radical in its views; this "testing" of scenes is an interesting aspect that sets this article apart from other critical examinations of Heller's work. Way also notes that while Heller is inventive when it comes to creating comedic scenarios, he fails at creating moments of emotion; he refers to how love is portrayed as non-serious as proof for this failure. He finally concludes that Heller should stick to comedy, rather than emotion; this conclusion though is problematic, though, as it is founded on a poor

Heller and to examine Heller's first work, *Catch-22*, with uncommon methods.

premise. This work would be helpful for setting up issues with the reception of Joseph