
THE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

What is an annotated bibliography? It is a bibliography that not only lists the sources you've discovered to write your essay but also briefly comments on the content, value, and relevancy of those sources.

The required information can vary from discipline to discipline; consider the following points when drafting your annotation:

1. The main topic or focus. In short, what is the subject matter discussed. Be precise. It is not enough to say, for example, that A.I. Silver's book, *The French Canadian Idea of Confederation*, examines Confederation or even French Canada and Confederation; anyone can get that information simply from the title. A more precise description of the topic might say: "Silver's book examines French Canadians' reactions to Confederation in both theory and practice between 1860 and 1900."

2. The thesis or main argument. Stating the authors' thesis is more than stating their topic or focus. Again, in the case of Silver's book, you would want to say something about how he claims French Canadians reacted to "the idea of Confederation." So, for example, you might say: "Silver argues that French Canadians were extremely ambivalent about Confederation and judged its worth according to its ability to protect their cultural and linguistic rights within their home province of Quebec."

3. The main arguments that support the thesis. Mentioning how the authors support their thesis is important because two or more of your sources may come to the same conclusions, but for different reasons. In addition, you will probably have other sources in your bibliography from authors who completely disagree on a particular issue. Therefore, you will want your reader to know perhaps how and why they disagree. Thus, going back to A.I. Silver, you might want to mention a couple of his main supporting arguments, especially those that relate to your own topic or thesis. For example: "In particular, Silver shows how French Canada reacted to the loss of French linguistic and cultural rights in New Brunswick, Manitoba, and the North West between 1870 and 1890 by turning inward to defend the rights of the province of Quebec to protect the last bastion of French culture in North America."

4. The authors' ideological or methodological perspective. A couple of other things you may want to include are the reason that the authors wrote the particular piece they did, and their ideological or methodological approaches to the issue. Are they responding to the issue on a personal level? Are they motivated by a particular historical anomaly, or flaws they see in the approaches of others? Is the piece written from a feminist perspective, a Marxist perspective, etc.? If you can identify these things and you think they are key to understanding the piece, then you should discuss them.

For example: “In revealing French Canadians’ growing ambivalence towards Confederation, Silver takes issue with much of the work of historian Donald Creighton, who argued that Quebecers generally embraced Confederation as the best way to protect their culture and language.”

5. The relationship of the source to your essay. Finally, you will probably want to mention briefly how you see yourself employing this material in your own paper. For example, if your paper examines the fallout from the Riel Rebellion and Riel’s subsequent execution, you might say: “Though Silver’s book does not deal exclusively with the issue of Riel’s execution, it will be instrumental in establishing the context within which French Canadians reacted to and interpreted it.” Or, if your paper examines the Acadian community in Atlantic Canada, you might say: “Silver’s discussion of Quebecers’ lack of interest in the New Brunswick school controversy will be extremely important in revealing why Acadians remained a separate and unique French Canadian community in the twentieth century.”

In the end, an annotated bibliographic entry for A.I. Silver’s book would look something like the following:

Silver, Arthur I., *The French Canadian Idea of Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

A.I. Silver’s book examines French Canadians’ reactions to Confederation, in both theory and practice, between 1860 and 1900. He argues that French Canadians were extremely ambivalent about Confederation and judged its worth according to its ability to protect their cultural and linguistic rights within their home province of Quebec. In particular, Silver shows how French Canada reacted to the loss of French linguistic and cultural rights in New Brunswick, Manitoba, and the North West between 1870 and 1890 by turning inward to defend the rights of the province of Quebec to protect the last bastion of French culture in North America. In revealing French Canadians’ growing ambivalence towards Confederation, Silver takes issue with much of the work of historian Donald Creighton, who argued that Quebecers generally embraced Confederation as the best way to protect their culture and language. Silver’s discussion of Quebecers’ lack of interest in the New Brunswick school controversy will be extremely important in revealing why Acadians remained a separate and unique French Canadian community into the twentieth century.

This is only an example of the information typically required for an annotated bibliography in the Social Sciences or humanities. No matter what discipline you are in, always consult with your professor or teaching assistant as to the particular content and format required.