

How to Write an Annotation

What is an annotation and why do I write them?

An annotation is a brief summary of a book, article, or other publication. *Its purpose is to describe the work in such a way that the reader can decide whether or not to read the whole work.*

A bibliography, of course, is a list of writings and is a standard appendage to a scholarly book or article. An annotated bibliography, in which each item is summarized, is valuable because *it helps the reader understand the particular uses of each item.*

The following points provide guidance for writing an annotation:

1. The authority and the qualifications of the author, unless extremely well known, should be clearly stated. Preferably this is to be done early in the annotation: "John Z. Schmidt, a Russian history professor at Interstate University, based his research on recently discovered documents."
2. The scope and main purpose of the text must be explained. For example, "He reveals that a few Germans played a key role in the events leading up to the revolution. They provided money, arms, and leadership which helped the revolution get started."
3. The major bias or standpoint of the author in relation to his theme should be clarified: "However, Schmidt's case is somewhat weakened by an anti-German bias, which was mentioned by two reviewers."
4. The audience and the level of reading difficulty should be indicated: "...Schmidt addresses himself to the scholar, but the concluding chapters will be clear

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to any informed layperson." Such a comment will serve to warn you (and other college student readers) away from writings which are too elementary or too scholarly.

5. At this point the annotation might provide a summary comment: "This detailed account provides new information that will be of interest to scholars as well as educated adults."
6. The preferred way to conclude an annotation is with some sort of reference to the usefulness of the source for your particular project: "This extremely informative resource will be useful when attempting to illustrate the impact that Germans, an earlier unnoted group, had on the Russian revolution."

Example of an annotation based on the above points of guidance:

Schmidt, Edward. *Germany and the Revolution*. New York: Putnam, 2003.

Schmidt, a Russian history professor at Interstate University, based his research on recently discovered documents. He reveals that a few Germans played a key role in the events leading up to the revolution. They provided money, arms, and leadership which helped the revolution get started. Schmidt's conclusions are radically different from those in Mark Johnson's *Why the Red Revolution?* However, Schmidt's case is somewhat weakened by an anti-German bias that was mentioned by two reviewers. Schmidt addresses himself to the scholar, but the concluding chapters will be clear to any informed layperson. This detailed account provides new information that will be of interest to scholars as well as educated adults. Schmidt's article will be extremely useful when attempting to illustrate the impact that Germans, a previous neglected group, had on the Russian revolution.