

INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR ARTICLE CRITIQUE OR ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Attach your articles to your paper. Double-space, Times 12-point font, please.

You should analyze 3 articles from any 2 different types of these three sources: academic book chapters, academic journals, or reputable academic websites.

I. CITATION. *Use a proper format (ASA, APA, Chicago Style Manual). Cite the article exactly as it should be in a bibliography.*

II. SUMMARY. *Sum up the important points in the article.*

III. ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS. *You should always think about these questions for every article or book you read in this course, in any course, and for anything you read.)*

1. Who is the author? What is the author's occupation, position, titles, education, experience, etc.? Is the author qualified (or not) to write on the subject?
2. What is the purpose for writing the article or doing the research?
3. To what audience is the author writing? Is it intended for the general public, scholars, policymakers, teachers, professionals, practitioners, etc? Is this reflected in the author's style of writing or presentation? How so?
4. Does the author have a bias or make assumptions upon which the rationale of the publication or the research rests?
5. What method of obtaining data or conducting research was employed by the author? Is the article based on personal opinion or experience, interviews, library research, questionnaires, standardized personality tests, etc.?
6. At what conclusions does the author arrive?
7. Does the author satisfactorily justify the conclusions from the research or experience? Why or why not?
8. How does this study compare with similar studies? Is it in tune with or in opposition to conventional wisdom, established scholarship professional practice, government policy, etc.? Are there specific studies, writings, schools of thought, philosophies, etc. with which this one agrees or disagrees and of which one should be aware?
9. Are there significant attachments of appendixes such as charts, maps, bibliographies, photos, documents, tests, or questionnaires? If not, should there be?

Discussion of questions:

The first question is, who is the author? What is the author's occupation? This information is nearly always provided (albeit briefly) on the first or the last page of the article. Locating relevant information about authors in their books is also touched upon. From this, you can tell if the author is a staff writer, a university professor, a company president, a researcher, a high school teacher, etc. Knowing this can help you anticipate possible responses to the other questions. Some of the first questions a critical thinker should ask are, Who is writing this? Does the author have any special knowledge of the topic? And, What is the author's motive for writing, if any?

That train of thought takes the discussion right into the second question. Sometimes the author has a hidden agenda and the reader should be on the alert for it. In most cases, however, authors will openly state their purpose. This will nearly always appear early in the article, generally within the first three paragraphs. In a book it is nearly always found in the prefatory or introductory sections. Often the author will even say something obvious such as "the purpose for this study is," or "my intention is to." You should be alert to these or similar phrases. Along with who the author is and the conclusions, the author's purpose is consistently the most easily found information necessary to answer the questions.

Question three, the audience for whom the author writes, is more often inferred or assumed than specifically identified. The answer can often be determined from the message of the author and consideration of who would be interested in the discussion. Other clues may be the writing style, use of jargon, footnotes, and assumed level of knowledge of the reader by the author. For example, if you have a noticeable problem understanding what the author is attempting to convey, the article may not be meant for the educated general public. Or, if considerable medical or legal jargon is used, the intended audience may be medical or legal scholars or practitioners.

Does the author have a noticeable bias? is the fourth question. Biases are sometimes easy to detect, particularly when they express themselves in the form of conservative or liberal politics or follow such schools of thought as Freudianism, Marxism or feminism (or positions antithetical to these). These perspectives are not necessarily correct or incorrect on any particular issue, but if detectable, they should be brought out in annotated bibliographies or critiques. The more knowledgeable you are, the easier it will be to spot bias. Many biases may not be obvious.

Question five asks about the conduct of the study reported. The method of obtaining the data or conducting the research will vary with the discipline. Some disciplines rely more on libraries, others on laboratories; some disciplines use textual analysis, others surveys, and still others empirical observation, etc. Most disciplines use a variety of data-collection techniques, and the method used in the article under consideration will usually be obvious, if not specifically stated.

The conclusions, the topic of the sixth question, are usually the easiest information to find. They are usually brought out in the abstract, if there is one, and certainly should appear in the final paragraphs of the article. In fact, the relevant sentences or paragraphs will often begin, "In conclusion," "In summary," or in some other obvious way. Too often when students (or others for that matter) do annotations, these are the main points – and often the only points – they include. It should be stressed that while these elements are important, an annotation, especially a critical annotation, needs more in terms of content.

Question seven, probably the most difficult for most students, asks whether the author satisfactorily justifies the conclusion. Students sometimes lack subject knowledge and may not be aware of what was not included in the study. To work on this question you must look at the purpose for writing the article and doing the research, the bias of the author, the intended audience and the method of collecting the data along with the conclusion. Is it internally consistent and does the logic follow? Did the bias determine the method of data collection or the interpretation of the data collected? Was the method of data collection the best one for the original purpose? Even if you do not arrive at opinions you are comfortable with, raising the issues and discussing them is valuable for the critical-thinking process.

Question eight attempts to determine how a study fits into the overall picture of the discipline and may not be so difficult for you as it first seems. Of course, the more subject content you know, the easier this will be, but authors will often mention other writers with whom they agree or disagree. If professional criticism is not specifically stated, you should be cognizant of the footnotes (or lack thereof). You can examine who is cited and how many citations support the author's perspective, or which authors are footnoted who receive critical treatment in the article. In some cases the argumentation will merely agree with or will challenge conventional wisdom; then studying footnotes may not be help.

With many studies, attachments – the subject of the final question – may clarify or otherwise enhance the basic text. If charts or maps are included (or should have been, but were not) it should be mentioned in the annotated bibliography or article critique. The same is true if a bibliography or list of recommended readings is included or is obviously lacking. If copies of tests or survey instruments used in the research are appended, they most definitely should be looked over and noted.