A bibliography is an alphabetical list of sources that a writer has used during the research process. The bibliography appears at the end of an essay, report, etc., and includes the full publication details of each source (e.g. for a book, the author, date, title, place of publication and publisher). The main purpose of a bibliography is to help readers find the sources the author has used or referred to.

An annotated bibliography is a list of sources with publication details and a short summary and (usually) an evaluation of the source. Sometimes it appears at the end of an essay or report, but usually it is a separate, “stand alone” document. Its purpose is to help readers determine the usefulness of a source and to provide researchers with information about the literature related to a topic.

An annotated bibliography helps you to:

1. Learn more about a topic.
   While creating an annotated bibliography, you will:
   - become familiar with a variety of sources on a topic
   - identify the purpose, the scope and the assumptions of each source, as well as its key findings and arguments
   - identify commonalities and differences amongst sources
   - critically evaluate sources, including the sources’ evidence, argument, contribution and significance.

2. Develop your own point of view about a topic:
   After analysing, synthesising and evaluating a variety of sources, you will be better able to develop your own point of view, or thesis, on a topic. So, creating an annotated bibliography is a very useful first step in writing an essay or research-based report.

3. Develop a foundation for future research:
   If you are undertaking a major piece of research, creating an annotated bibliography will help you to develop a hypothesis for testing. A completed annotated bibliography also provides future readers and researchers with a guide to the relevant literature on a topic and, hence, a foundation for further research.

An annotated bibliography can contain up to 4 elements:

1. Bibliographic details (author, year, title etc.)
2. Summary of the contents of the source
3. Evaluation of the source
4. Reflection on how the source has helped your project or point of view

(Look at these elements in the example over the page.)
Look at these elements in the example below:


An experiment in which perennial ryegrass and white clover plants were exposed to constant radiation level (500µE /m²/s) and three constant levels of CO₂ availability. Length of exposure to radiation and differing temperature treatments were imposed. Fertility was not limiting and soil was at field capacity in terms of water. Dry matter measurements, including leaf growth rates and tiller population dynamics, are reported for a full 12 month period (Palmerston North data). Comparable with other data available for lower North Island sites. 

_Potentially a good data set for modelling or testing._

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How do I get started?

With any research and writing project, following a clear process will help you produce the best possible final product. Of course, research and writing does not always follow exactly a neat series of steps, but a basic process is a useful guide to keep you “on track”.

1. Choose the topic
2. Select the sources
3. Summarise and evaluate the sources
4. Write the annotations
5. Present the bibliography

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What style and format should I use?

There are several styles commonly used for annotated bibliographies. Check your assignment instructions to find out, for instance,

- how long each entry should be
- whether you should write in phrases or whole sentences
- what referencing style should be used
- what layout is expected

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Useful resources

*For general advice and sample annotated bibliographies, you could start with:*


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If you would like more help with academic writing, visit our website at [http://ltl.lincoln.ac.nz/](http://ltl.lincoln.ac.nz/) or ask at the Service Point about the workshops, drop-in sessions, and individual appointments we offer.