Annotated Bibliography (10% of overall grade)

What is an Annotated Bibliography?
To annotate means “to make or furnish critical or explanatory notes or comment” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online).

Merriam-Webster provides us with three useful definitions for bibliography:
1: the history, identification, or description of writings or publications
2a: a list often with descriptive or critical notes of writings relating to a particular subject, period, or author, b: a list of works written by an author or printed by a publishing house
3: the works or a list of the works referred to in a text or consulted by the author in its production (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online).

An annotated bibliography is a research tool; it is one document that contains descriptive and critical information about items you have found in research that might be useful. Generally speaking, it is not something you turn in for a grade; it is “database” for your own use. In a way, an annotated bibliography is like a diary. It helps you keep track of what you have found (a description), where and how you found it (citation information), and how it might or might not be relevant to your research (critical evaluation).

The annotation is the part you write; it is not a summary or paraphrase; it is your interpretation and evaluation. The bibliographic entry is the APA or MLA citation that is used in reference lists.

In this annotated bibliography, describe and evaluate the contents and attributes of the work you have found. Write a narrative paragraph of 50-100 words providing that information and an assessment. List the works alphabetically as you would in a reference list at the end of an academic paper. The descriptive and critical paragraph follows each listing. See the example below.

Lax has written the only authorized biography of Woody Allen. For more than 30 years, Lax has had full cooperation of Allen in discussions about the filmmaker’s professional endeavors and personal life. In this book, he has integrated the development of the various forms of the Allen’s work (one-liners, TV sketch work, plays, essays and films) with his personal growth and relationships. Originally published in 1992, this 2nd edition includes discussions of films since then and of Allen’s life since his contentious break in ties with actress and companion Mia Farrow. This is an essential work for understanding Allen’s history and development from his point of view.

The most practical reason for using this tool is to make the most of the research you have done and to ensure that you don’t have to “backtrack” to get the same information later on. Also, this tool greatly speeds up your efforts to create the reference lists for the papers you write, because you will already have the reference information the in correct format. And since the verbiage in the annotation is your reformulation of key ideas, there is no reason to worry about plagiarism if you use any of those ideas in your papers.

The annotated bibliography is different from a reference list at the conclusion of a paper—it is yours. The reference list becomes part of the paper. The reference list contains the works that are cited in your paper, whereas a bibliography contains a greater range of works related to the topic but not necessarily used in a particular paper.

For a related discussion, please read Section VII of The Little, Brown Handbook (Aaron, 2001). It contains a discussion of the “working bibliography.” You will find this similar to an annotated bibliography, but it does not stress the value of the descriptive and critical assessments that a useful annotated bibliography provides.

References