Writing an Annotated Bibliography

What is an annotation?
An annotation is more than just a brief summary of an article, book, Web site or other type of publication. An annotation should give enough information to make a reader decide whether to read the complete work. In other words, if the reader were exploring the same topic as you, is this material useful and if so, why?

What is an annotated bibliography?
An annotated bibliography is an organized list of sources (like a reference list). It differs from a straightforward bibliography in that each reference is followed by a paragraph length annotation, usually 100–200 words in length.

Depending on the assignment, an annotated bibliography might have different purposes:
- Help to formulate a thesis on a subject
- Demonstrate the research you have performed on a particular subject
- Provide examples of major sources of information available on a topic
- Provide a literature review on a particular subject
- Describe items that other researchers may find of interest on a topic

Types of annotated bibliographies
There are two major types of annotated bibliographies:
1. Descriptive or informative
   *this is the type you will be using for your History assignment (see examples)
2. Analytical or critical

To get started
Now you are ready to begin writing your own annotated bibliography.
- Choose your sources Before writing your annotated bibliography, you must choose your sources. This involves doing research much like for any other project. Locate records to materials that may apply to your topic.
- Review the items Then review the actual items and choose those that provide a wide variety of perspectives on your topic. Article abstracts are helpful in this process.
- Write the citation and annotation When writing your annotation, the complete citation should always come first and the annotation follows. Depending on the type of annotated bibliography you are writing, you will want to include:
  1. The purpose of the work
  2. A summary of its content
  3. For what type of audience the work is written
  4. Its relevance to the topic
  5. Any special or unique features about the material
  6. The strengths, weaknesses or biases in the material

Annotated bibliographies may be arranged alphabetically or chronologically, check with your instructor to see what he or she prefers.

Guidelines for formatting the citations
Remember, the citations themselves must be formatted properly. At Kent, that means Chicago Style for history. If you have questions about correctly formatting your citations, you can find help in the Library or the ARC. Also check the library and ARC websites for tips and handouts.
3 Examples of Descriptive/Informative style of annotations:

Descriptive or informative annotations:
A descriptive or informative annotated bibliography describes or summarizes a source; it describes why
the source is useful for researching a particular topic or question, and also its distinctive features. In
addition, it describes the author's main arguments and conclusions without evaluating what the author says or
concludes. (see points 1-6 of “To get started” on previous page)

Example 1:

This editorial from the Economist describes the controversy surrounding video games and the effect they have on people
who use them. The author points out that skepticism of new media have gone back to the time of the ancient
Greeks, so this controversy surrounding video games is nothing new. The article also points out that most critics
of gaming are people over 40 and it is an issue of generations not understanding one another, rather than of the
games themselves. As the youth of today grow older, the controversy will die out, according to the author. The
author of this article stresses the age factor over violence as the real reason for opposition to video games and
stresses the good gaming has done in most areas of human life. This article is distinctive in exploring the
controversy surrounding video games from a generational standpoint and is written for a general audience.

Please pay attention to the last sentence. While it points out distinctive features about the item,
it does not analyze the author's conclusions.

Handout and Example #1 Adapted with permission:

Example 2:

"The first serious study in English of the Vampire, and kindred traditions from a general, as well as from a
theological and philosophical point of view." Concludes that "it is hard to believe that a phenomenon which has
so complete a hold over nations both old and young, in all parts of the world, at all times of history, has not some
underlying and terrible truth however rare this may be in its more remarkable manifestations." The study covers
appearance, characteristics, causes for, feeding habits of, and precautions to be taken against. Includes case
histories, ancient accounts, an anthropological-type survey of various nations, asides on premature burial,
necrophilia, and various perverse and antisocial acts. Contains a chapter on the vampire in literature and a
bibliography of both true and fictitious vampires. A fascinating account which proves the old adage about truth
and fiction.

/writing-an-annotated-bibliography.html.

Example 3:

Jordan offers an in-depth look at the hows and whys of Texas graveyards. He divides vernacular burial sites into three
categories: Mexican, German, and “Southern folk cemeteries.” His physical descriptions of cemetery layout,
inscriptions, grave markers, and the like are very detailed.