Writing Annotated Bibliographies

Annotated bibliographies provide an overview of each of the major books or articles that you are using for your project. The annotations have two functions: 1) they indicate to the reader that you have read, understood, and evaluated each text within the context of your project, 2) they give your readers a basis on which to decide whether these texts might be useful for the research, and 3) it helps you keep track of your sources and how they relate to each other. In other words, annotated bibliographies summarize your understanding of a text, and then assess the text. Annotations that simply summarize are not considered successful - your role is to evaluate the text and locate it within the context of your field or your specific research.

Guiding Questions for Annotated Bibliographies
- **What is the central argument of the text in question?**
  Try to summarize that argument in a sentence or two.
- **What part(s) of the text may be applicable or useful for the specific project that you are working on?**
  Be sure to explain how or why you believe the ideas connect to your project.
- **What part(s) of the text seem problematic or unhelpful?**
  Be sure to explain specifically what you considered problematic, and point out other authors whose works might better explain or clarify that problem.
- **Did you notice any connections between this text and other texts on your list?**
  Were there related ideas? Did one text attempt to comment on or correct another? Is there a link between concepts that you haven't seen mentioned elsewhere?
- **Overall, did you think this text was valuable and worthwhile for researchers in your field?**
  Back up your evaluation with specific references to the text, and offer your assessment of whether other researchers might benefit from reading it.

Organizational Questions for Annotated Bibliographies
- **How long should each annotation be?**
  Length varies depending on the length of original text (generally, an annotation for a book would be longer than that for an article). Generally, you should aim for a short paragraph or two.
- **How should my annotated entries be organized?**
  An annotated bibliography takes the same basic format as a regular bibliography or references page. List your sources in alphabetical order, provide complete bibliographic information for each source, and be sure to follow the citation style appropriate for your discipline.
- **What kind of audience should my annotated bibliography target?**
  The annotated bibliography format assumes that you are addressing other people in your academic discipline. Instead of imagining a "general" audience, you would benefit from imagining a group of other researchers who are knowledgeable about your field, but who may not be familiar with the specific topic you are addressing. Your goal is to provide them with enough information about each source so that they will know whether it would be worth their while to read those materials themselves.