

Annotated Bibliography for Your Major Research Project

Your major research project for Senior Seminar challenges you to explore current and recent knowledge and to make new knowledge about some aspect(s) of English Studies that is interesting and important to you and others in the field.

You will read, write informally (journal), and talk about possible topics for your research project. You will also conduct a forum analysis to look at possible venues for publishing your project, as well as to consider your audiences and their expectations for topics, documentation styles, rules of reasoning and evidence. Keep your intended audience and forum in mind as you move ahead with your project.

The next step will be for you to read and write on the topic you've chosen. One helpful form for this reading and writing to take is the *annotated bibliography*. An annotated bibliography presents a record (using MLA documentation style) of what you've read and a brief, critical summary of each item.

Find **eight** recent, substantial, scholarly journal articles, book chapters, or books on your topic.

- *Recent*: published in the last decade
- *Substantial*: at least five pages long
- *Scholarly*: peer reviewed and written for an academic audience

Read each article, book, or chapter, understand it, and summarize it. (Aim for about 200 words for each annotation.) It makes sense for you to select, summarize, appreciate, and critique each text with specific attention to the topic and question driving your research project. Also endeavor to identify the author's theoretical and/or methodological choices and orientations. Except for clearly marked quotations or cited paraphrases from your source, the annotation should be written in your own words. Be sure to include your assessment of the value *for your research project* of the text you are summarizing and critiquing.

On the next page, I have written a sample annotation. It is a little longer (about 250 words) than what you need to do for each of your texts (@ 200 words), but otherwise I tried to make it cover the bases I laid out for you above.

A final note: the details and timing of the annotated bibliography assignment are open to negotiation. If, for example, you want to do a substantial amount of drafting before delving into the scholarship on your topic, talk with me about it.

Thanks to my colleague, Professor Sally Parry, for permission to adapt her "Annotated Bibliography" assignment.

Hillocks, George. *The Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning*. New York: Teachers College, 2002.

Hillocks carefully explores statewide writing assessment in five states: Oregon, Texas, Illinois, New York, and Kentucky. Hillocks investigates the theories informing each state's assessment process; the standards, criteria, and sample texts used to frame each; and what teachers and administrators say about each test's impact on teaching and learning. He also offers his own reflections on and critique of how writing is taught and evaluated.

Hillocks presents the devastating critique that most states dramatically lower and narrow their expectations for students' writing and thinking abilities in order to make testing quick, cheap, efficient, and agreeable. Our home state of Illinois probably comes off looking worst of all, with brief, superficial, thoughtless, fake writing from students (and how could they write anything different under these circumstances?) earning the highest scores. By vivid contrast, Kentucky, with its statewide portfolio system, shows how good assessment can promote good teaching, learning, and writing.

Hillocks's analysis of students' writing is heavily influenced by Stephen Toulmin's framework for argument: data, warrants, and claims. By the end of the book, this gets to feeling a little heavy-handed and exclusive of other ways of valuing students' (or anyone else's) writing. Hillocks also buys wholesale Berlin's now outdated three-part taxonomy of theory in rhetoric and composition: current-traditional, expressivist, social-epistemic. This, too, gets to feeling rather stale and limiting by the end of the book.

Nevertheless, the critiques and proposals that emerge from the book are intelligent, witty, colorful, and extremely powerful. Someone will use this book to help transform statewide assessment in Illinois to a system in which students' portfolios are judged by Illinois teachers of writing.