Welcome! My name is Kathleen, and I work in Writing and Learning Services here at MacEwan University.
So, you’ve been asked to write an annotated bibliography, but what is an annotated bibliography?

An annotation (n.d.) is “a critical or explanatory note or body of notes added to a text” (def. 1).

In other words, an annotated bibliography is a list of sources that includes both reference entries and annotations of the sources.
Annotated bibliographies can have many purposes. As a course assignment, an annotated bibliography is often part of a larger assignment. It’s a way for you, the student, to get started on your research and for your instructor to ensure you’re on the right track before you write the full assignment.

Outside of the university classroom, people prepare annotated bibliographies for a wide variety of reasons. Let’s take a look at some of those reasons!
Researchers may compile annotated bibliographies of their own research as a way of showing the scope and quality of what they've accomplished.

Annotated bibliographies may review the literature published on a particular topic, or they may be used as the first stage of preparing a literature review.

They may also be attached to research to show the reader supplementary, illustrative, or alternative sources.

Likewise, this practice allows the reader to see if the researcher consulted a particular source . . .

Or to find examples of other resources on the topic.
Okay, so now that you know what the purpose of an annotated bibliography is, you probably want to know what it looks like.
Read the sample annotation. Pay attention to what each piece is doing and try to identify the functions of the four elements.
Elements of an Annotation


Corn highlighted the innovative strategy of incorporating unicorns into nursing practice in order to ease patients’ anxiety and improve patient outcomes. Using a quasi-experimental design, Corn’s preliminary evidence from her research trial indicates that adult patients benefit from unicorn therapy.

Corn’s preliminary finding that unicorns have an equivalent therapeutic value for adult patients in addition to younger patients is an exciting area of research, but the reliability of these findings is questionable. While Corn’s research methodology appears to be sound, a level of bias is present. For example, Corn is one of the founding editors of Unicorn Therapy, a brand new journal. That said, the evidence is compelling, suggesting that further research is necessary. And Corn does cite a number of other independent researchers working at well-respected institutions. This article should be of interest for nurses and nursing researchers.

This paragraph of an annotation varies. Very brief annotations may include only the summary and evaluation portions, but longer annotations frequently include a third section. Always check the guidelines for your assignments to see if a third section is required. If it is required, this paragraph could be a reflection, a comparison to other research, or an explanation of how the source fits into the larger topic, paper, or project.
Annotated bibliographies can take a variety of forms; however, most annotations contain four main components.

First, a reference entry lets the reader know what source is being annotated.

Then, in the annotation, the first paragraph is generally a summary of the source, and the second paragraph is typically an evaluation of the source.

Some annotations end there, but a third paragraph is often added. This paragraph might be a reflection, a comparison with other sources, or an explanation of the relevance of the source to the larger project. Sometimes, it may be more than one of these things.
Here are the guidelines for two different annotated bibliography assignments. Let’s take a look at them to highlight what’s similar and what’s different.

As you can see, both annotations share the summary or description component as well as the evaluation component. They both also include a third paragraph, but in the Nursing 251 annotation, the third paragraph requires the writer to compare and contrast the source to another source. In other words, the student must draw connections between the sources that make up the bibliography.

Whereas in the Nursing 372 annotation, the third paragraph requires the writer to describe the relevance, effectiveness, and usefulness of the source
How to write your annotations

1) Reference Entry
   - Write a complete entry for your source

2) Summary
   - Identify the topic, main points, purpose, and conclusions

3) Evaluation/Assessment
   - Explain strengths and weaknesses, reliability, bias, intended audience, and usefulness

4) Reflection, Comparison/Contrast, or Relevance
   - Follow your assignment guidelines

Here are the steps you can follow when creating your annotated bibliographies:

First, write a complete reference entry for your source.

Next, identify the topic, main points, purpose, and conclusions. Remember to include only the most important points—this type of summary is brief.

Now, explain the strengths and/or weaknesses, reliability, bias (if any), intended audience, and usefulness of the article for your research.

Finally, check your assignment guidelines, and include any additional components that may be required.
Questions?
There are many quality resources you can access to get more information about annotated bibliographies. Here's a selection of some of the best resources to get you started.

- [http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/cite-write/citation-style-guides/annotated-bibliography](http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/cite-write/citation-style-guides/annotated-bibliography)
- [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/)
- [http://wiki.ubc.ca/Library:How_to_Write_an_Annotated_Bibliography](http://wiki.ubc.ca/Library:How_to_Write_an_Annotated_Bibliography)
- [http://guides.library.ucsc.edu/write-an-annotated-bibliography](http://guides.library.ucsc.edu/write-an-annotated-bibliography)
Remember, there is lots of help available to you at MacEwan University. If you need additional help with the writing portion of your assignments, please book an appointment with Writing and Learning Services.

If you need help with your research, such as finding sources, please visit the reference desk in the Library.