To annotate is to furnish notes or critical commentary on a piece of writing. The Annotated Alice, for example, a book devoted to explaining the many puns and allusions in Alice in Wonderland, gives us a fuller understanding and appreciation of Lewis Carroll's wit. An annotated bibliography is a list of sources on a specific subject that provides brief descriptions of each source. An annotation can be as brief as a phrase or as long as a fully developed paragraph. The longer type indicates the major points made by the author and also assesses the quality or utility of the work. It may include such elements as the perspective or major argument of the writer, the purpose of the work, the special characteristics of the work that help to strengthen or weaken it, and the utility of the work for researchers in this field. Because of the space limitations the writer has to work with, it is especially important to be specific yet succinct—a difficult task in any kind of writing.

Getting specific in annotations: In writing an annotation the more specific you can be the more helpful the annotation will be for the reader. Notice the difference a few words can make:

- The article traces Smith's development as a writer.
- The article shows how Smith grew increasingly cynical and radical over the course of her career.

OR

- The article is a discussion of Jones's use of imagery in his early poems.
- This is an examination of Jones's use of animal imagery to suggest his fear of radicalism in "The Great Wad" and "Time for Reason."

Getting specific in thesis statements: Here are some examples showing how important it is to be specific in thesis statements:

- Praise must be used carefully when motivating employees.
- Using praise to motivate employees is a much more complex issue than books like The One-Minute Manager would have us believe.

OR

- Dickens' novels reveal his attitudes about England's class structure.
- While Hard Times reveals Dickens' sympathies toward the poor, it also suggests his middle-class prejudice against the working class's efforts to organize.

(See the back of this sheet for examples of helpful and unhelpful annotations.)
Which of the annotations below do you find more helpful?

**Journal Article**

This article by Carlos H. Bauman is about rehabilitation and if it really works. It looks at California and the relationship between the rehabilitative model and recidivism rates in that state. He asks if our prisons are set up to work within the rehabilitative model. It is an interesting and helpful article for anyone researching rehabilitation.

vs.

The author, a sociologist, argues that rehabilitation, the most appealing justification for use of the criminal sanction, does not work in our present system. He bases his argument largely on a ten-year study of California, a state that has incorporated the rehabilitative model and yet has one of the highest recidivism rates in the U.S. This article has a particularly clear and compelling discussion of the weaknesses inherent in assumptions underlying the rehabilitative model.

**Book**

This book is a comparison of how people see defense attorneys in books, television, and real life. This image gets in the way of a defense attorney doing their job effectively. It was entertaining to read how the defense attorney has changed over time and the problems he faces today.

vs.

This book compares the image of a defense attorney as he is portrayed in film and fiction with that of his real life counterpart. The author contends that the public’s notion of the public defender is colored by the “Perry Mason” ideal engaged in a constantly searching and creative investigation. In real life, he argues, most defense lawyers are continuously on the losing side and thus suffer the discontent of their clients who feel they did not work hard enough. More than just an entertaining look at the evolution of the fictional defense attorney, it argues convincingly that many of the problems facing such attorneys today are the direct result of this distorted image.