**How to Write an Annotation for a Source**

Once you’ve selected a topic and some sources, it’s time to start thinking about what you’ve found and how it helps you with your Fictional Autobiography. If you investigate, think about, and answer the following questions about each source, writing the final annotations will be easier. You might not be able to answer all of the questions for all of your sources, but try to answer as many as you can. (See the completed example on the other side of this page.)

_**Use this handout to break down the article and write your annotation:**_

**For Primary Sources:**

Who is the author and why should you pay attention to what she or he has to say? That is, what are the author’s credentials?

What is unique about this source?

How will this source specifically help you with your fictional story?

**For Secondary Sources:**

What are the author’s main ideas?

Does the author seem to be trying to reach or influence a particular audience? If so, who is the intended audience? Scholars? General adult population? Everyday consumers? A group of people sharing a particular point of view?

How does this source compare/contrast to others in your bibliography?

How does this source support/influence your story?

How is your source organized? Is there any supplemental information that is helpful, such as appendices, index, and bibliography?

*Put all of the above ideas together and you have an annotation for your source!*

Excerpt from original source:

The Italian comes in at the bottom, and in the generation that came over the sea he stays there. In the slums he is welcomed as a tenant who "makes less trouble" than the contentious Irishman or the order-loving German, that is to say: is content to live in a pig-sty and submits to robbery at the hands of the rent-collector without murmur. Yet this very tractability makes of him in good hands, when firmly and intelligently managed, a really desirable tenant. But it is not his good fortune often to fall in with other hospitality upon his coming than that which brought him here for its own profit, and has no idea of letting go its grip upon him as long as there is a cent to be made out of him.

Jacob Riis, author of How the Other Half Lives

Example: Use this handout to break down the article and write your annotation:

Who is the author and why should you pay attention to what she or he has to say? That is, what are the author's credentials?

Jacob Riis documented the plight of the immigrant and poor in New York during the 1890s.

What are the author's main ideas?

While he appears to have empathy for the Italian, he also shows a prejudice by stating that the Italian is willing to live in a "pig sty." He also is showing prejudice against the Irish who cause disorder, and even the German who apparently would complain about the living conditions, wherein the Italian just lives there without causing problems or complaining.

What is the purpose and depth of the work? Is it a broad, general overview? Does it cover something specific? Does it leave anything out?

The overall work was to show the living conditions of the poor and immigrant communities.

What is the author's point of view, perspective or assumptions upon which the work is based? Are there indications of bias, such as strong language or a one-sided presentation of the facts/issues? If so, provide examples of these indications.

The author uses straightforward, balanced, and clear language for his time, but he is also very prejudiced.

Does the author seem to be trying to reach or influence a particular audience? If so, who is the intended audience? Scholars? General adult population? Everyday consumers? A group of people sharing a particular point of view?

Everyday Americans.

How does this source compare/contrast to others in your bibliography?

This source is unique because this man actually saw and witnessed the living conditions of the immigrant community. And although he was prejudiced at times, he really did want to help these people.

How does your source HELP you with your Fictional Autobiography?

This piece describes the living conditions that I will face upon arriving as an immigrant and also provides the type of stereotyping and/or prejudice that existed prior to my arrival (even from the people who wanted to help) so I know what to expect from Americans who already live here.

Here's what an entry for this article would look like in an annotated bibliography using Chicago Style:


Jacob Riis, a well known advocate on the behalf of immigrants and poor, documented extensively the living and working conditions of this group of people at the end of the 19th century. In my fictional autobiography, I am going to use this primary source to describe the type of living conditions that my character will find themselves in. Not just living quarters, but I also plan on using Riis’ prejudicial statements about the Italians, Irish (and others) to show in general, how Americans felt and behaved toward the immigrant community. These attitudes and prejudices will make it even more difficult for assimilation and acceptance to occur in my new homeland.

You must separate your Primary Sources from your Secondary Sources on your Annotated Bibliography.