Preface

Creating an Annotation was first published in 1979 as a guide for staff members of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress (NLS), who provide book announcements for the information of patrons using the service. Its purpose was to give a frame of reference for a consistent approach to annotation goals and content. The document was well received by a wider library community, being utilized by other Library of Congress units and appearing on library school reading lists. Copies have been requested from services throughout the United States and around the world.

The need for well-written annotations remains the same today, and much of the material from the first edition is retained in this revision, although the presentation may be somewhat different. In addition, some material needed expansion, and some new areas for discussion have appeared.

Much of the material new to this edition concerns specifics on treatments of bibliographic information and formal elements of style, which were mentioned only briefly in the1979 volume so that the content would have more general application. However, such considerations are essential for making this a truly useful manual for NLS staff. NLS treatments may not apply to other groups involved in annotation writing, but every group needs to establish a workable format. To this end, ours may be helpful as an approach.

The original manual was conceived and written by Viola (Vicki) Harrington Fitzpatrick, writer-editor in the NLS Publications and Media Section, and has served as the basic annotation reference for NLS writers and editors for nearly a quarter century. She is also responsible for the gradual development over the years of this revised and expanded version.

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Part One:
The Words

Why annotations?

NLS provides information to readers through book announcements, and annotations are an integral part of these announcements.

The purpose of annotations is to help readers select books that they want to read. This aim is consistent with, and part of, the purpose of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS)—to make available to blind and physically handicapped readers a library collection and service similar to that available to any reader through the public library system.

Individuals who are blind or handicapped have the same need as other library patrons to know about the contents of books before they decide to read them, but special conditions prevent them from using print library services for information. They can't browse until something attracts attention or use card catalogs and other reference material. They can't hold the book in hand and see the pictures, check the table of contents for material included, or flip pages to sample writing style.

NLS works to provide access to book-information services through book announcements to readers, and annotations are an integral part of these announcements. These announcements are used in a variety of ways: on the copy-allotment information used by network libraries to determine the number of copies of a particular book they wish to order for circulation to readers; in the bimonthly magazines *Talking Book Topics* and *Braille Book Review,* which readers use to select recently produced books; in annual and biennial catalogs of books produced during the dates listed; in subject bibliographies and minibibliographies devoted to a specific topic. The annotation is also narrated as part of the introductory information to a recorded book.

Most important, the annotation forms part of the database for the NLS *International Union Catalog,* which contains bibliographic records for braille and audio books available from a variety of sources in the United States and abroad. All records cite the holding agency, an essential feature for access to the material listed.

Annotations seem to be everywhere, and they remain with us for a long, long time. Consequently, each one needs careful consideration to begin with. While NLS has not recorded titles on either rigid or flexible discs for more than a decade, books already produced remain a part of the collection. Similarly, production of titles on cassette is being phased out in favor of a digital format, but the existing books will remain available to patrons, probably also for many years to come.

Elements of book announcements

Basic information about the book appears first. It is generally the same information available to print readers:

- title—identifies the book
- subtitle (if any)—provides additional information
- author (or editor, compiler, translator).

Also included is information specifically for our audience:

Elements

- a book number for ordering, which consists of a two-letter prefix that indicates the medium (RC for recorded cassettes, BR for braille, RD or FD for discs) followed by four or five digits
- the name of the reader in case patrons have favorites or prefer male or female voices
- the number of discs, cassettes, or braille volumes to indicate the length of the book

- reissue or rerecord (when appropriate) to indicate that the book has been available before; patrons may have read it or wish to read it again.

Annotations, brief descriptions of what's in the book, follow and form the core of book announcements—the part that gives the content and flavor of the work. Other information that readers might find useful is incorporated in the annotation and often comes after the description of the book's content:

Additions

- sequel or prequel to …. (early in the annotation or the first item after the description)
- part of a series (if not given in a subtitle)
- statements about strong language, violence, and descriptions of sex
- grade level for juvenile or young adult books
- awards to author or book
- status as a bestseller.

Annotation replaces browsing

Such information is available, most of it on book jackets, to library patrons who can handle books. Sighted people can often determine the presence of sex, violence, and strong language through jacket summaries or by sampling a few pages. Sampling will also help with decisions about grade level and appropriateness of content. Because our readers cannot sample the books, they need to be provided with the information.

What an annotation does and doesn't do

An annotation covers the scope of the book and the author's approach—either directly through statements or indirectly through tone and style—and gives readers enough information to make their own decisions. It does not say this is a good book; it shows that. Good annotation

writing doesn't declare itself; it is good because it doesn't intrude on content, but complements it. An annotation should:

An annotation should...

- reflect content
- be interesting and readable
- avoid being judgmental.

The announcement as a whole should be

- bibliographically accurate
- stylistically correct
- written for audio as well as visual readability.

An annotation is not...

An annotation is not a review. A review gives general information about content, considers the author's intent, and comments on success. It expresses a personal point of view and is always signed, either individually or in a list of editors.

An annotation is not an abstract. An abstract gives a condensed version of total content. It's generally used for technical works and shows the problem tackled, method or procedure, and conclusions drawn. Total content is more information than our readers need; too many facts can kill interest rather than arouse it.

Considering content

Before writers can write or editors edit, they must understand the goals and recognize the elements that make up a good annotation. They also need to be aware of general approaches, specifics that need attention, and areas that can create problems.

What makes a good annotation?

The good annotation

Bad annotations will generally declare themselves; the good ones pass by relatively unnoticed. This phenomenon is not unique to annotations or to good writing of any kind. People send letters to newspaper editors about grammatical mistakes and typographical errors, while accepting as normal and expected all the words that are correctly spelled and properly used.

Eleven models:

Therefore, let's take a look at some well-written annotations and focus on what makes them work. The concepts covered in the comments will be developed in more detail later, but an overview here helps to establish the goal.

(1)

Open Season: Sporting Adventures
by William Humphrey

Annotation: Thirteen urbane articles by an outdoor writer. "My Moby Dick" finds Humphrey in the Berkshire Hills resolved to take a thirty-pounder in a sporting manner befitting its own dark nobility. "The Spawning Run," about salmon fishing, is also an essay on the ancient sport of cuckoldry. A self-revealing story, "Birds of a Feather," is an ode to a plucky little woodcock.

Comment: The introductory sentence provides specific information about the book's contents (*thirteen articles*) and contrasts the approach (*urbane*) with the subject (*the outdoors*). The three articles selected

illustrate the writer's respect for the creatures he pursues (*sporting manner befitting, dark nobility, plucky*) and hint at whimsy and another kind of hunt (*the ancient sport of cuckoldry*). Note how well the descriptions relate to the title of each article.

Welcome the Morning
by Bobby Hutchinson

Annotation: Charlie Cossini looks like a frail Dresden figurine. But when she bellows orders to her carpenters in that strong, husky voice, it's easier to believe that she's the boss of her own, all-female construction crew. Idle rich playboy Ben Gilmour, a Hawaiian real-estate baron, is captivated by Charlie's incongruities at their first meeting. Explicit descriptions of sex. Harlequin Novel.

(2)

Comment: The description of the heroine, whose name (*Charlie*) implies a male, is immediately contrasted with her appearance (*frail Dresden figurine*) and then the traditional masculine image is restored (*bellows orders; strong, husky voice; boss of her own…construction crew*), and the image is reinforced by *incongruities* in the next sentence. The hero, in contrast, is described only by who and what he is (*idle rich playboy, real-estate baron*). The only hint as to plot is in the final sentence; he's *captivated by.* That's enough plot; these two people are surely going to get together somehow. It's more than enough when followed by *explicit descriptions of sex* and *Harlequin Novel.*

Magic Kingdom for Sale—Sold!
by Terry Brooks

Annotation: When Ben Holiday arrives in Landover, the magic kingdom he purchased through a mail-order department store, he finds the place in a shambles. The taxes have not been collected, the peasants are without hope, the barons refuse to rec-

(3)

ognize him as king, and a dragon is laying waste to the countryside. Bestseller.

Comment: What can you expect when you buy a kingdom by mail order? The second sentence builds, with fine parallel construction, from the mundane of uncollected taxes to the exotic of a destructive dragon. The tone fits the book.

An Evil Cradling
by Brian Keenan

Annotation: Held hostage for four and a half years in Beirut, an Irish teacher describes how he dealt with the mental and physical abuse inflicted by his captors. First in solitary confinement and later in the company of other hostages, Keenan was determined to endure the maltreatment by the Shi'ite militiamen. He attributes his survival in part to his ability to explore the condition in which he found himself. Violence.

(4)

Comment: An appalling subject is given serious and careful treatment. The first sentence defines the *evil cradling* of the title immediately with *held hostage,* adds information about the place and duration, identifies the author (*an Irish teacher*), and concludes with the book's thesis: how he dealt with twofold abuse, both mental and physical. The second sentence adds details about his confinement and his captors, and reinforces the theme of *determination.* The final sentence deals with how he believes he set his mind to accomplish his goal. Violence is implicit in the subject, and the one-word descriptive tagline sets that out starkly.

Pubis Angelical
by Manuel Puig

Annotation: Experimental novel interweaves reminiscences and dreams with an examination of political and sexual issues. The story—set in central Europe in the 1930s and a Mexico City hospital

(5)

ward in the 1970s—contains allegorical excursions, possibly fantasized, into a post-atomic age of the far future. Explores the vicissitudes of twentieth-century Argentine history, the travails of the female psyche, and the necessary role of fantasy in human life. Descriptions of sex.

Comment: Good defining first sentence: *Experimental novel* provides an immediate alert to something unusual, followed by the contrast of mystical elements (*reminiscences and dreams*) with more earthy concerns (*examination of political and sexual issues*). The rest of the annotation provides supportive details about the approach (*allegorical excursions, possibly fantasized; post-atomic age of the far future*) and the contrast (the entire third sentence). The plot is alluded to only in an aside about time and place. This book is not about plot.

Malice Domestic
by Mollie Hardwick

Annotation: The coming of forbidding Leonard Mumbray to the peaceful English village of Abbotsbourne seems to cast an evil spell. Pretty antique-store proprietor Doran Fairweather feels it, as does local vicar Rodney Chelmarsh, a widower with whom she has a budding romance. When Mumbray is found murdered, there is a collective sigh of relief. But Fairweather, a nosy type, is unable to rest until she finds the killer.

(6)

Comment: Again, a fine first sentence, in this case filled with foreboding. The second sentence introduces the main characters, in connection with the attitude already indicated. The third sentence also deals with attitude, this time that of the whole *peaceful English village.* The final sentence sets the plot in motion.

The Panic of ’89
by Paul Erdman

Annotation: It is late 1988, and eminent economist Paul Mayer contemplates a grim future. The second lucky term of Ronald Reagan—blameless and unworried during his last days in office—is about to end, leaving a very troubled world economy in its wake. As the stock market drops out of sight, Mayer must race against time and adversaries to save international banking from total chaos. Strong language and descriptions of sex. Bestseller.

(7)

Comment: A suspense novel featuring an unlikely hero, introduced in the first sentence along with the date and a hint at the problem. The rest of the annotation continues to set up the situation and the conflict.

The Rose in My Garden
by Arnold Lobel

Annotation: A story in rhyme about the many kinds of flowers that grow near the hollyhocks that give shade to the bee that sleeps on the only rose in the garden. For grades K-3. 1984.

(8)

Comment: The single run-on sentence, which would not be good for most books, echoes the premise of this one: that all these things are together in the garden and doing something for each other.

Lightning: An 87th Precinct Novel
by Ed McBain

Annotation: A series of grotesque crimes confronts the officers of the 87th Precinct. First, two women track stars are found hanging, lynch-mob style, from the lampposts of brilliantly lit city streets; then a rapist stalks an increasing number of victims. Gutsy Eileen Burke, an undercover officer in Special Forces, undertakes a key role in catching the maniac. Some strong language.

(9)

Comment: Another in a popular series of police procedurals; all many readers will need is the subtitle identifying the series. The annotation lays out the subject, two types of crimes against women, and the featured detective, also a woman. It catches the flavor with adjectives such as *grotesque* followed by the most visible image of women *hanging, lynch-mob style, from the lampposts of brilliantly lit city streets,* which is juxtaposed with the dark, stealthy image of a *rapist stalking.*

Maiden Voyage
by Graham Masterton

Annotation: In 1924 the SS *Arcadia,* the greatest luxury liner ever built, is on her maiden voyage from Liverpool to New York. Among her passengers is twenty-one-year-old Catriona, flapper of the seas and heiress to the vessel. Dramatic adventures occur in rapid succession against a backdrop of wild love affairs, financial intrigues, and popping champagne corks. Strong language and explicit descriptions of sex. 1984.

(10)

Comment: The annotation is almost entirely setting. Time: the Roaring Twenties, which is reinforced by labeling the young, rich protagonist a *flapper.* Place: a *luxury liner* crossing the Atlantic. Background: *wild love affairs, financial intrigues, popping champagne corks.* What happens? *dramatic adventures* and *in rapid succession* too. The reader doesn't need to know more.

The Downing Street Years
by Margaret Thatcher

Annotation: Memoirs of the grocer's daughter who became prime minister of Great Britain. Thatcher recounts her political life, beginning with the day the Conservatives gained a majority in the House of Commons and she, as head of the party, was asked to form a new government. She speaks

(11)

candidly of the members of her cabinet, her contacts with foreign leaders, her efforts to reform the Tories, her pursuits of national interests, and her last days at Number 10. Bestseller.

Comment: The first sentence announces the category (*memoirs*) and identifies the author from her origins to high office. The next sentence defines the area covered (*her political life*) and adds information about her party and the British political process. The final sentence adds still more information about the wide range of subjects, both national and international, and about people involved. All three sentences present her voice behind the book (*memoirs, Thatcher recounts, she speaks candidly*).

Annotating a variety of books

General approaches

Different types of books need different approaches for annotations. Some are harder to annotate than others, and some have particular things to include and particular traps to avoid. Most books will fall into a recognizable category and some general approaches will apply.

The basic divisions are fiction and nonfiction, and the annotation should make the distinction clear. The annotation should be written from different premises for fiction and nonfiction and should sound different as a result.

• Fiction

Fiction

Give enough information to show the tone of the book, the general plot elements, and the characters involved. Use the language of the annotation to pique the reader's imagination. Prefer present tense and active voice. Don't simply summarize the plot, and never disclose the ending.

Escapist fiction: westerns, gothics, romances, family sagas, historical novels, adventure stories, science fiction, detective and mystery stories, spy stories, and suspense. Probably the largest part of the material in our col-

lection, or any general public library collection, falls into these categories. These books are for fun, relaxation, getting away. Many of these books are written according to a formula:

- Beautiful heroine and handsome hero meet; something or someone keeps them apart for 200 pages; they finally get together (gothics, romances, some historical novels, some mysteries).
- Hero and heroine get together in the first chapter and have trouble with their relationship(s) for 300 or more pages (contemporary novels).

Popular genres—vary the formula

- Stern, lonesome male struggles against outside forces and his own isolation; he eventually wins out (westerns, adventures, some historical novels, some science fiction).
- Someone is murdered; suspects abound; the detective, or other protagonist, must—and will—discover the murderer (mysteries).
- Someone (usually the protagonist or a major world figure) is about to be killed. Alternatively, all of civilization is about to be destroyed. Our hero/heroine must locate the source of danger and avoid that fate (suspense novels and some science fiction).

Such material is among the easiest to annotate. The basic concern is to show what happens or who is involved in this book that makes it different from other books of the same kind. Because the author had the same problem—making this book different in some way—look for his or her plot or character twist and emphasize it.

Some fine books have been developed from such formulas; some authorities argue that there are only five or six basic plots and that all fiction is a variation on one of them. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is plotted around what keeps a beautiful heroine and a handsome hero apart; *Shane* is a

western with the stern, lonesome male as its central character. Both books are generally considered classics—because of what the authors made of the basic plot elements. Annotations for such books should not be simply summaries of plot. Do incorporate plot elements, but stress presentation.

Classics—be careful

Classics. Annotations for familiar books, classics both old and new, must be handled carefully. These books are well known and people can feel strongly about the words used to describe their content. Annotation writers need to determine and express the factors that make these books exceptional.

The Glass Menagerie: A Play by Tennessee Williams

Annotation: Portrays the remnants of a southern family with pretensions to gentility. The plot centers on the crippled daughter, who lives in her dream world with a symbolic collection of fragile glass, in vivid contrast to the family's slum apartment.

Comment: The background, characters, setting, theme (fantasy vs. reality), and symbolism are there. There is no attempt to summarize the plot, which is not the important element of this play.

Note that a book is not necessarily a classic because it is old. Books generally considered classics will not only have been in print and available to several generations of readers but will also have had an impact on the literature that followed. Minor works by authors of classics may be of interest but are not classics in themselves.

Don't assume fame lasts

Bestsellers. Current bestsellers have been widely reviewed and annotated in other sources. The authors are probably promoting their books on the talk-show circuit and are available in the reader's living room at a flick of the TV switch. Friends and family members may be discussing

these books. Because readers can make critical comparisons between what they already know about the book and what the annotation tells them, the bestseller's annotation should receive careful consideration and be as full, accurate, and interesting as possible.

Just as for other books, however, the annotation will outlive the book's bestseller status, and writers should not assume that patrons will later instantly recognize the contents. Particularly for nonfiction books of timely interest, writers must make sure the subject matter is clearly identified. For example, readers who avidly followed the O.J. Simpson murder trial will probably easily place the lawyers for both sides who have written books on their version of events, but the annotation should spell out what the trial was about and the particular point of view of the author. The material will not be so familiar a decade after the event.

• ***Nonfiction***

Dealing with reality, or an opinion on reality

Nonfiction

The language or the annotation should make clear immediately that the content is either factual or a commentary on actual events. Avoid using *the story of,* which suggests fiction even though colloquially that phrase is also used to describe nonfiction.

> **Magnetic North: A Trek across Canada**
> by David Halsey
> *Sentence:* **Tells the story of** a twenty-year-old inexperienced camper who set out from Vancouver in 1977 to traverse the wilderness to the other coast.
> *Rewritten:* **Recounts the adventures of…** Note that the simple change not only indicates that the events described are real but uses, appropriately, much more active words.

Biographies and memoirs. Such books are primarily nonfiction, but occasionally a novel can be a thinly disguised memoir, and fictionalized biographies are quite common. If the bibliographic information is not sufficiently clear, make

sure that the annotation explains that the work is a fictionalized biography of… or is based on personal experience.

Life of... or memorable events

For biographies, give the authority of the author when it is relevant. For memoirs, the author's name can be sufficient authority, but an identifying word or phrase is helpful (*actress, salesman, evangelist*). Avoid inserting superlatives; if the person is indeed one of the world's most famous, he or she doesn't need such a wordy label. More information is needed for memoirs that are related to a personal experience of an unfamiliar individual.

Keep the annotation balanced by summarizing the total approach and scope. Don't use all the space for background and early years, even though those may be the least familiar areas of the subject's life, unless that is the emphasis of the book.

Emerson: The Mind on Fire
by Robert D. Richardson

Annotation: Traces the life and intellectual odyssey of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the nineteenth-century writer, poet, and essayist. Discusses Emerson's development of the principles of individualism, self-reliance, and transcendentalism that have influenced American letters and thought. Richardson chronicles Emerson's life as student, minister, traveler, speaker, social activist, good friend, and loyal family man.

Comment: The introductory sentence identifies the person of the title and indicates the dual thrust of the book—the course of a man's life and the extensive reach of his mind. The next two sentences expand the first, covering first his thoughts and then his actions.

The Village
by Alice Taylor

Annotation: Warm remembrances of daily life in the Irish author's adopted County Cork village. In this sequel to *Quench the Lamp (RC 33774),* she relates with humor and a bit of wistfulness the changes that married life brought to her and that modern times brought to the village.

Comment: The first sentence, which briefly outlines the author's background, shows immediately that the events covered are intimate rather than newsworthy. The approach is summed up in *warm* and *with humor and a bit of wistfulness.*

Mental health: professional approaches and popular gurus

Psychology and self-help. These books generally cover a particular aspect of mental function and health or present a method for achieving desired attitudes and behavior. Such information forms the body of the annotation. Some background or authority of the author is essential for readers to understand and give weight to the usefulness of the approach for their needs and interests.

Often in such works, the author uses familiar words in a specific context or coins phrases to apply to this particular method or conclusion. Such phrases are fundamental to the book and often receive fairly lengthy treatment. In the annotation, they need brief definition, at least parenthetically, to define the special meaning. Alternatively, they should be put in quotes to indicate that there is something particular in the way the words are used.

Emotional Intelligence
by Daniel Goleman

Annotation: The *New York Times* science writer argues that emotional intelligence is as much a factor of success as is the intelligence quotient. And because self-awareness and control of toxic emotions can, he says, be taught, he calls for education to

guide children's emotional development. He also discusses ways adults can continue to grow emotionally.

Comment: The author's authority and thesis are laid out in the first sentence. Proposals for action follow.

How Good People Make Tough Choices
by Rushworth M. Kidder

Annotation: The founder of the Institute for Global Ethics and former columnist for the *Christian Science Monitor* offers guidelines for dealing with ethical dilemmas. Using anecdotes to illustrate conflicts between truth and loyalty, individual and community, short-term and long-term goals, and justice and mercy, Kidder shows how decisions are made using ends-based, rule-based, or care-based principles.

Comment: The first sentence introduces the author and the subject. The next lays out the type of choices dealt with and the author's method of categorizing them.

Instructions on doing practical things

How-to's and practical guides. The annotation should give an overview of the book's content and note any background of the author that has a bearing on his expertise. It can be short if the title and subtitle are close to a full explanation, but it cannot be omitted because an entry without an annotation appears to be an error.

If the book has special sections, indexes, or summaries, the annotation should explain that these are included. Use *contains* or *includes* for publications that have separate sections on particular subjects. For content description, it is better to use *covers, describes, explains, explores*, or an appropriate synonym.

The Able Gardener:
Overcoming Barriers of Age and Physical Limitations
by Kathleen Yeomans

Annotation: Nurse and gardener Yeomans covers general aspects of gardening while emphasizing adaptive techniques such as using raised beds, back-saving tools, and easy-care plants. For visually impaired gardeners, she suggests designing with plants that are fragrant, textured, edible, or even audible. Contains exercises for gardeners and mail-order sources for plants, seeds, and supplies (including adaptive tools).

Comment: It's all there: author's background, general approach and specifics for the topic, followed by supplementary information.

• ***Collections***

Collections

Collections are popular with many readers; they like material broken into segments that can be read at one sitting. But such fragmentation of material makes it difficult to give an overall picture of the book. There is no space for annotating individual stories, essays, or poems; therefore, the whole collection must be described in general terms, augmented with specifics that can capture interest.

Poetry

Poetry. Books of poetry are probably the most extreme example of fragmented material. They often cover long periods of time in the poet's thinking and development, many different thoughts with various treatments, and some images and ideas concisely expressed. The nature of the material makes for slow reading, and the concepts are extremely hard to express in a brief annotation.

Don't fall back on vague phrases about *love and life* that could mean anything and could apply to almost any poetry collection. Be specific. Look for a unifying theme, or summarize two or three representative subjects and approaches.

Mention titles that may be familiar or interesting, but offer more than a list.

My Alexandria: Poems
by Mark Doty
Annotation: Doty uses the ancient city as a metaphor for his search for an ideal place of beauty and light. Although he sees demolished buildings, panhandlers, dementia, and mortality, he finds the substance of poetry in a flower garden, in stories in a book, in innocent children, and in the power of hope as in an unopened Advent calendar.

Collected Poems 1919–1976
by Allen Tate
Annotation: Roughly chronological arrangement of poems written over almost six decades by the classicist and critic. Subjects range through the emotion of "Death of Little Boys," memories of southern boyhood in "The Swimmers," and reflections on the futility of war in "Ode to the Confederate Dead."

Short stories

Short stories and essays. These collections have the same problem of fragmentation—too many subjects—although not to the same degree as poetry. In most cases the same solutions and techniques apply: find a unifying theme or list two or three representative ones. Frequently the collection will be built around a theme covered in the title or subtitle, and all that is needed is some explanation or enlargement.

Usually, tell how many stories, essays, or articles are included; the number will give the reader some idea of the length of each. When one piece is familiar, be sure to list it. If short stories are interrelated, say so. When different authors are represented, select a few of the most popular for mention.

Key West Tales
by John Hersey

Annotation: Set in Key West, Florida, these fifteen short stories form a coda to a life of writing that began in World War II. "God's Hint" is a brief tale about a preacher who spots an offshore wreck in the midst of his Sunday sermon and positions himself to capture the prize. Seven more historical anecdotes follow, alternating with longer contemporary stories.

The Mysterious West
edited by Tony Hillerman

Annotation: One character in this anthology observes that where people live has an influence on how they live and "who and how they choose to kill." These twenty suspenseful short stories are set in the American West. Authors best known for westerns are mixed with those known for mysteries, including Marcia Muller, Bill Pronzini, Bill Crider, and Stuart Kaminsky. Some strong language and some violence.

The Complete Essays of Montaigne
by Michel de Montaigne

Annotation: English translations of the sixteenth-century French philosopher's "essays," a literary form Montaigne invented to convey his ideas and opinions. His diverse subjects include feelings, the education of children, the custom of wearing clothes, the disadvantage of greatness, evil employed as a means to a good end, the power of the imagination, a lack in administrations, and not communicating one's glory.

Humor. Books intended to evoke a laugh, or at least a smile or two, can be in either the fiction or nonfiction category. Nonfiction books are most often collections of essays and are subject to the same problems as other collections.

Funny stuff—fiction and not

Fiction books usually involve odd characters in improbable situations. In either case, the situation should be described, not simply pronounced as *funny.* There are many types of humor that can be indicated: parody, satire, slapstick, dark. Give examples that evoke the flavor of the book, and use language to intensify the image.

Descriptive adjectives are acceptable; judgmental ones are not. A descriptive adjective applies to the author's intent or approach to the subject; a judgmental adjective tells what the writer thinks about it. The author can intend to be *humorous* and that term used to describe the approach; how well he or she succeeds in provoking mirth is up to the reader to determine.

A Farce to Be Reckoned With
by Roger Zelazny and Robert Sheckley

Annotation: This comic fantasy features the fox-faced demon Assie Elbub, who hits on the idea of bringing humanity to Evil by staging an immorality play with all of Renaissance Europe as the backdrop. But the meddlesome Archangel Michael, that insufferable agent for Good, arrives on the scene and threatens to close down the play before it ever opens.

Dave Barry's Complete Guide to Guys: A Fairly Short Book
by Dave Barry

Annotation: According to Barry, this is a book about guys—not a book about men; books about men are too serious. Barry begins with a test to determine the reader's "guyness" and then gives a brief account of the role of guys in history, their biological nature, their social development, and their special guy problems. For women, there is a chapter on dealing with guys. Some strong language and some descriptions of sex. Bestseller.

Take special care with warnings

Sex, violence, and strong language. Statements about strong language, violence, and explicit descriptions of sex are hard to apply to collections; they may be needed for only one story or a particular section of the material. Readers who are concerned with avoiding these aspects might be deprived of much they would enjoy if the whole book were given a warning label. In these cases, the information is better incorporated into the annotation. Sometimes both notations may be needed, with the information within the description indicating where this material is found.

Amen
by Yehuda Amichai
Annotation: Israeli poet mingles simplicity with directness in poems on the Jewish experience of alienation and the constant threat of war. Collection also contains intense and erotic love poems. Some explicit descriptions of sex.

• *Juvenilia*

Children's books

Basically, language and construction are the same as for adult books, but vocabulary is simpler. Character names should be used, since they are usually chosen by the author to be appealing. Content should relate to the child's experience and engage the imagination.

Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing
by Judy Blume
Annotation: Peter Hatch resigns himself to losing the battle for attention with his two-year-old brother. Little Fudge ruins Peter's special poster, gets lost at the movies, and eats Peter's pet turtle. For grades 3-5.
Comment: Including some of Fudge's antics lets a child know exactly what Peter must contend with and hints at humor. A child might be motivated to read the book because he identifies with Peter or because she wants to find out how Peter handles the problem.

Hot as an Ice Cube
by Philip Balestrino

Annotation: Clear text and simple experiments present basic information about heat, which exists in everything—even in ice cubes. For grades K-3.

Comment: Strictly speaking, the mention of ice cubes is not essential. The rest of the annotation is pretty dry, however, and the ice cubes add the ironic punch inherent in the title.

The Mitten: An Old Ukrainian Folktale
by Alvin Tresselt

Annotation: On the coldest day of winter, a little boy's lost mitten becomes the shelter for a mouse, a frog, an owl, a rabbit, a fox, a wolf, a boar, and a bear! For preschool-grade 2.

Comment: Naming the animals is a direct appeal to children, most of whom like stories about animals, and it creates wonder about how all the animals crowd into one mitten. Young children like the cumulative effect of long lists of things.

Curious George Flies a Kite
by Margaret E. Rey

Annotation: Curious George tries to fly a big kite one windy day, but the kite pulls the mischievous little monkey way up in the sky!

Comment: Children thrill to the switch here—the kite flying the monkey instead of the monkey flying the kite. The idea is both titillating and scary. And of course, they want to know how George gets down.

Annotations for older children have the same characteristics, but there can be more detail and more information

about real people, especially those whose names do not have instant recognition.

How I Broke Up with Ernie
by R.L. Stine

Annotation: Amy has grown tired of her relationship with Ernie and just wants out! No one seems to understand why she wants to break up with Ernie, and, worse still, no one seems to accept it. Ernie keeps coming around; her parents welcome his presence; and he even tags along when Amy goes out with Colin, the new guy in her life. For grades 6-9 and older readers.

Comment: This situation is familiar to most young people just moving into pairing off, and there doesn't have to be a reason for it. One person is ready to move on, and the other isn't. The repetition of Ernie's name would be too much in most annotations but not in this one; Ernie is always there.

Isaac Newton
by Douglas McTavish

Annotation: Explains how Isaac Newton, best known for his discovery of the laws of movement and gravitation, effectively invented modern science by using methods to test and cross-check scientific theories. The author traces Newton's life from his birth in England in 1642 through his long years of scientific discoveries that include the laws of light and refraction, the invention of the reflecting telescope, and calculus. For grades 4-7 and older readers.

Comment: Because Newton's name may not be instantly familiar, the first sentence repeats it and goes on to tie him to his field—science—and explain his preeminence. The remainder of the annotation is more specific about what the book covers, including time and place.

Time and Place

When and where make a big difference

Most annotations need to be anchored in a place and a time frame. Without some allusion to place, the text can be misleading; mysteries set in a large American city and in a small English village are likely to have fundamental differences in approach and atmosphere. Indicating that a book is a historical novel cries out for some reference to the time of the action. Nonfiction works, of course, are usually very specific.

• Nonfiction

Nonfiction

For some books, the title and subtitle will include this information, and it should not be repeated in the text.

The title may tell

Stolen Continents: The Americas through Indian Eyes since 1492

Rising in the West: The True Story of an Okie Family from the Great Depression through the Reagan Years

Europe in Our Time: A History, 1945–1992

Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960

Or the annotation must

Some figures or events will be familiar enough to suggest an era without adding a date. Most American readers will instantly place George Washington with the American Revolution, Abraham Lincoln with the Civil War, and Dwight D. Eisenhower with World War II—and thereby identify at least the appropriate century. Napoleon has also lent his name to an era. However, some well-known figures of the distant past probably need dating; not all readers could immediately place the Chinese philosopher Confucius in, or even near, the fifth century B.C.

Some more recent figures would benefit from dates, a time span, and even a place.

Showa: The Age of Hirohito
by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler

Annotation: Covers Hirohito's years as emperor of Japan from 1926, when he was hailed as a god-king, to his death some seventy years later, when he had become a constitutional monarch—a symbol of state as well as a symbol of the profound changes that had taken place during his reign. During this period Japan experienced tremendous industrial-military expansion, World War II, and unparalleled postwar growth. For junior and senior high readers.

Comment: This book is intended for young adults. Given what studies keep finding about general knowledge of history and geography in this age group, it is doubtless useful to be specific about the country and the dates as well as who this person was and events in his life. Older people won't be hurt by a reminder.

Queen Victoria: A Portrait
by Giles St. Aubyn

Annotation: The author of several books on Britain's royal family, including *Edward VII: Prince and King (RC 15046)*, provides a portrait of the woman who came to the throne in 1837 as an unknown girl and who was, when she died in 1901, mourned by the whole world. St. Aubyn represents Victoria's development in six distinct stages: princess, young queen, bride, wife, widow, and ruler of a vast empire.

Comment: The person portrayed will suggest the last half of the nineteenth century, which is close enough for most references. For a full, lengthy biography (this book takes six cassettes), more precision is needed.

Other nonfiction works can be handled very briefly in the text with phrases denoting the decade or century, references to well-known historical figures or events, or even specific dates.

Phrases that work

- life of the late-nineteenth-century novelist
- during World War II
- with Robert E. Lee at Appomattox
- after the Norman invasion of England in 1066
- the British explorer (1630–1675)
- political and economic decisions of the 1920s that led to the Great Depression
- Jack Benny's popular radio show of the 30s and 40s moved to television in the 50s.

Contemporary works, especially memoirs, usually declare themselves as such by the content but may need a reference to the current decade to retain clarity in the future. For all books, but particularly for nonfiction, phrases that indicate currentness of a book should be avoided. Use specific dates or decades, or tie the annotation to events with a familiar time frame. Avoid such phrases as:

Words to avoid

- from … to the present
- using recently discovered material
- new research shows
- newly released papers
- today's
- in this decade

Fiction

About the past

Historical. Historical fiction is the fiction genre that most obviously needs to be firmly rooted in a time and place. It matters in giving substance to the plot elements that the setting is real and tied to a particular location and situation; that the time is in the far past or relatively recent. Some Australian fiction sounds remarkably like an American western if not identified, for the good reason that both are dealing with similar frontier societies. And setting—time and place—can be almost the only thing that differentiates one historical romance from another.

The Sheriff of Nottingham
by Richard Kluger

Annotation: In 1208, English churches are closed because of a clash between King John and Pope Innocent III. Hoping to quell the rebellious clergy, the king sends sheriffs into each shire. Philip Mark goes to Nottingham. A kind-hearted man, Philip is sorely tested when ordered to hang a group of Welsh boys held as hostages. He is also among the justice-seeking men who draw up the Magna Carta. Violence, strong language, and descriptions of sex.

Comment: The time, country, and situation are specific, as they need to be to lead up to the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215. Because placing this particular sheriff in Nottingham evokes the familiar Robin Hood legends, the annotation has to point out the somewhat later time frame and the considerable difference in this man's character from Robin Hood's adversary.

Audrey
by Mary Johnston

Annotation: In early eighteenth-century Virginia, young Haward takes an orphaned girl, Audrey, as his ward but places her care in someone else's hands. When he next sees Audrey, he is amazed by her

beauty, but unfortunate circumstances turn her against him.

Comment: The setting differentiates this book from others of its kind. Change the locale and the names and you have another formula romance.

Or from the past

Historical vs. old. Note that there are some traps in dealing with what at first glance appears to be historic in nature. *The Grapes of Wrath* now appears to be set in the past, but John Steinbeck was writing in the 1930s about a situation that was all too real at that time and presenting characters who could have lived his tale. Thomas Hardy used the English countryside and the attitudes of its people as basic elements of his novels, and the novels belong to that time. The annotation should make clear that the book's subject was contemporary for its author. This can be done through the date at the end, if the writing was long enough ago for the date to attract attention. Generally, it is better to include some time reference in the body of the annotation:

- Nineteenth-century novel explores
- First published in 1819
- Eighteenth-century comedy of manners

Dates, which generally are not included in the examples in this manual, are the last element in NLS annotations and serve to give information about the time the book was written. (*See* Dates and time, p. 150.)

Old* and *historical

Historical fiction is not a new form, so annotation writers will also have to deal with some older books, including classics, that are about times that were long past when the book was written. Sir Walter Scott may have invented the form in the nineteenth century; certainly he was an early and prolific practitioner with such classics as *Ivanhoe* and a host of others. Napoleon's invasion of Russia happened two generations before Tolstoy's massive and evocative *War and Peace*. The American Civil War was only a memory,

although a persistent one, when Margaret Mitchell wrote *Gone with the Wind.* Both time frames may not need to be spelled out, depending as usual on the content, but make sure the annotation does not cause confusion.

New but sounding old

An additional difficulty comes in differentiating contemporary works set in a previous era and written at least somewhat in the style of the era. Regency romances have become a genre in themselves in the past few decades and will probably not be confused with works from that time, even with dust-jacket claims about the author being a successor to Jane Austen. But novels labeled as Victorian should be by authors of that period; contemporary works with a Victorian setting need to be identified as such. (*See* Eras, p. 162.)

The time is now, and the place matters

Contemporary settings. As mentioned earlier, the setting adds to the atmosphere of the book and needs to be indicated, at least briefly if incidental and more specifically if it is essential to the tone and situation. A *small, sleepy southern town* will present a picture quite different from *in lower Manhattan* or *at a Malibu beach.* A city name is usually enough, but towns often need states or countries, especially when the place is obscure or has the same name as several other towns. And *New York* as a name is rarely sufficient by itself; the city and upstate areas are distinctly different.

Sometimes adjectives describing a character will also indicate the setting. *Scotland Yard detective* places the setting in England, most probably London. *Hollywood starlet* covers both a profession and a location.

Be clear about places

Using the book's language. Within the book, the setting is doubtless clear and references to places will—and should—be those used in that region. Using the same terms in the annotation will not work unless the setting and the attitude have already been indicated. A reference to *the Cape* obviously means Cape Cod when the characters are known to be somewhere in Massachusetts, but not other-

wise; there are many capes in this country and around the world.

Annotation: Tomboy Jessie Warfield and her friend James Wyndham often compete in horse races in 1820s Baltimore, Maryland. James speaks of his English cousins, Marcus and Duchess Wyndham, so when Jessie must flee the **colonies,** she turns to them for help.

Comment: The book does use the term *colonies,* probably because the English cousins still thought and spoke of the United States that way. But without that context established, writers have to treat Maryland and other parts of the United States, which had achieved independence almost forty years earlier, in more usual terms. Jessie was fleeing the **country.**

Sensitivities

Sensitivities—Watch your words carefully

Word choices can say much about attitudes, and annotations should be free of the annotation writer's attitudes. The author's attitudes are another matter; points of view should be both noted and attributed. The following situations can present problems.

• Disabilities

Disabilities

Because the audience for NLS annotations is, by definition and statute, made up of people who have a visual or physical disability, the book collection offers many titles on or about disabilities. Annotation writers must take great care not to stereotype or depict people with disabilities negatively or as objects of pity. So should all writers, but we in particular want to set a standard of writing without even a hint of condescension.

People with handicaps are people

Several organizations working in the field of disabilities produce material about acceptable terminology. Particular phrases change over time, and people concerned with dis-

abilities should refer to current lists for information, particularly as to approach and attitude. Such suggestions are not necessarily definitive, however; some attempts to be politically correct have been so arcane as to be devoid of meaning. Judgment is needed.

In general, NLS writers always try to think in terms of people rather than conditions. Thus, we use phrases such as *people with cerebral palsy* rather than *the cerebral palsied,* and *blind individuals* rather than *the blind.*

Never use words or phrases like *afflicted with* (which evokes pity), or *the victim of* (which indicates some kind of intention). And wheelchair users are not *confined* by their method of locomotion but rather given the ability to move. Be specific whenever possible (the person has a particular condition), and avoid characterizations and implied judgments. *Crippled* implies complete dysfunction and has no place in an annotation for nonfiction titles; it might sometimes be appropriate for a fiction work where the physical condition is symbolic of an emotional state or an attitude.

• ***Ethnic and race***

Ethnic and racial designations

We try, as much as possible, to use terms that reflect the preferences of the group involved. These terms also tend to change over time, often by design of the group members themselves, to emphasize a particular aspect of their background or an attitude toward it. Thus, *African American* is the current term for Americans of African descent, but some annotations for books in the collection reflect the time when they were written by their use of *Afro-American, black, Negro,* and even *colored.* These terms should be updated to current usage when such titles are reissued or when older material is listed in subject bibliographies. Note that *black* is still acceptable and useful, especially when referring to communities or neighborhoods; the other terms listed above are not, except on rare occasions when needed for historical context.

Don't create anachronisms

In general, we use *Native American* to refer to the indigenous people of the whole Western Hemisphere, and more particularly those of Canada and the United States. That does not mean, however, that the word *Indian* has vanished from our vocabulary or theirs. Those peoples in Mexico and further south are often still referred to as Indians in their own countries and therefore often in material about those countries. Also, references to specific groups sometimes need the word *Indian,* as in *Delaware Indians,* where changing the term to *Native Americans* would be both historically inaccurate and linguistically forced. For groups where the designation is appropriate, the term *nation* is desirable: the *Sioux Nation,* for example. This term does not, however, apply to subgroups within a nation or smaller groups that were never affiliated with others; these can always be identified by name. *Indian* should usually be preferred to *Native American* in annotations for classics; James Fenimore Cooper was not writing about the French and Native American Wars, and his attitude and approach are distorted by applying modern terms to a historical context.

Don't hyphenate people

NLS follows *Chicago* (*The Chicago Manual of Style, Fourteenth Edition,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), which calls for leaving ethnic designations followed by *American* open (no hyphens), both as adjectives and nouns: *African American, Italian American, Japanese American.* It is not always necessary to use the full term, however, if the context makes it clear that a community in this country and not overseas is being discussed. If the annotation places the setting in a section of Boston largely occupied by people of Irish extraction, the reader is not going to be misled into thinking that *Irish* means people in Ireland.

Jewish is generally used as a religious designation and not followed by *American,* even though the term also has ethnic connotations.

Hispanic can be used for all groups from a Spanish-speaking background, although some groups immigrating to the United States or with ancestors from western hemisphere countries are endorsing *Latino* as the preferred term, since the connection with Spain is several centuries old and by conquest to boot.

Needless to say, terms considered derogatory have no place in an annotation. If a biased attitude is a major aspect of the book, readers can be informed of the content without the use of inflammatory language.

• Gender

Gender

Avoid using gender-specific words to encompass both sexes. *Human* can usually be used in some form for words like *mankind* or *man's,* and both sexes are *people.* The context will suggest other possibilities.

Watch word choices

Most gender-specific words for occupations are rapidly disappearing from the language, partly in response to civil-rights protests and partly to reflect reality, as women continue to enter many occupations that were once dominated by men. Often the word has simply been truncated to remove a male suffix or changed to reflect the activity; thus, *policemen* become *police, workmen* become *workers, mailmen* become *letter carriers.* In many cases, one designation encompasses both sexes, and most of the "ess" suffixes to indicate a female practitioner of a craft have for practical purposes ceased to exist. *Poetess,* always slightly archaic in sound, is never seen, and even *actress* is used primarily where a distinction needs to be made, as for awards and the like; collectively, people whose profession is acting call themselves *actors.*

Pronouns can lead to considerable difficulty. Don't use *he* or *his* for both sexes; if a singular is called for, use *he or she* or *his or her.* Sometimes indefinite pronouns such as *anyone* or *everybody* can be used, but these can lead to a reappearance of the problem in a later clause that refers

back to the singular subject and leaves the writer again reaching for a way around *he* or *his.* Using the plural form after this construction is not acceptable to NLS, even though it is often done elsewhere. The easiest solution, when possible, is to use the nonspecific *they* (or a plural noun) to begin with, followed by the plural form of a verb and plural references thereafter.

Watch your attitude

All of these guidelines concern language and usage, but some more subtle practices can also relegate women to a secondary position. Books by or about a man and a woman should indicate an occupation or characteristic for both, not just for the man. The phrase *wife of,* by itself, is insufficient and demeaning, especially when applied to coauthors or subjects of a dual biography; both people must be credited for their activities and achievements. Likewise, referring to male characters by their last names and female characters by their first names indicates that the women are somehow less important or less worthy of respect. The type of book will determine whether first or last names are used, but the sexes should be treated evenhandedly. Even the choice of descriptive adjectives can contain not-so-subtle put-downs: all denoting *vigorous* and *powerful* for the men and *vapid* and *voluptuous* for the women.

• Lifestyle

Lifestyle

More and more books are featuring characters with nontraditional family arrangements and lifestyles, not surprisingly, as these situations become more common and more openly discussed in our society. Descriptions of this material should let the reader know what to expect, just as in descriptions of any other kind of book. If the annotation depicts a tender love story, the reader will assume two sweet young people of different sexes unless told otherwise, either directly (*homosexual, lesbian*) or by sentences that feature men or women together. This practice does not mean that the sexual orientation of all characters has to be listed any more than does other descriptive information, but

Don't be evasive

features bearing on motivation or the direction of the plot should be clear.

Judgments

One of the fundamentals of annotation writing is to avoid judgments. This concept can be difficult for people who are accustomed to reading book reviews. Reviews are supposed to give opinions; that is their function. Reviews in publications like *Library Journal* not only give opinions but recommend books for general collections or for specific types of libraries and clientele; these reviews help librarians in buying books for their collections. Selection in these cases means choosing where to expend funds, and advice can be useful.

Judgments—best left to the reader

The purpose of an annotation is different. The book has already been selected—and deemed worthy of inclusion in the collection—according to a carefully written policy designed to provide many books of interest to the majority of readers and something in all fields for readers with particular interests. In that sense, it has already been judged to be good. The annotation is there to help an individual reader decide if this particular book is one he or she would want to read. The decision is up to the reader; the annotation gives information for making that choice.

There are two strong reasons for avoiding judgments. One is credibility. It is not unusual for people reading a book because of a recommendation to find that they disagree, sometimes strongly. People react to books in different ways, and a reader may react to the same book differently at various times. After a few experiences with following someone else's opinion and being disappointed, the reader can easily mistrust information that is supposed to be helpful.

A second reason for avoiding judgments is that they often appear as condescending. (*See* Sensitivities, p. 31.) Most blind people have experienced the degrading attitude that

their blindness makes them inferior and renders them somehow incapable of making their own judgments and decisions. They surely do not want that kind of negative thinking reflected in information they receive about books produced specifically for them by a service that should be well aware of this issue.

Taglines—sex, violence, and strong language

Information on the existence of strong language, violence, and sex is available to library patrons who can handle print books, either through summaries on book jackets or by skimming through the pages. These elements are frequently more vivid in spoken than in written form and can disturb some readers. Because our readers cannot sample the content before ordering the book, they need to be made aware of the presence of these elements.

Taglines are content information

These phrases are not considered judgmental; they simply contain information for readers similar to information conveyed in the other parts of the annotation. It is up to the reader to determine whether he or she wishes to read the book, or if such content has any bearing on that decision.

Neither are these taglines a form of censorship, as has sometimes been suggested. The books are available for any reader who wishes to order them. It would be censorship to delete the passages or to decide not to produce the books in recorded or braille formats because they contain offensive elements, rather than to follow general selection guidelines for the approximately two thousand titles that can be produced each year from the more than sixty thousand titles listed in *Books in Print.* (For specific use of taglines, *see* p. 155.)

Planning an annotation

Writers can't just plunge in and write something; they have to know where they are going and why. Creating a good annotation takes thinking and planning. There are five steps, which will take varying amounts of time depending on the content of each book.

- Study what the book is about.
- Select information to include.
- Structure the order of presentation.
- Determine an appropriate length.
- Choose a writing style to fit the book.

Note: the actual writing will come last!

Study—planning begins with learning

• Sources include...

Study what the book is about

Sources

A multitude of sources exist for information that could be used in an annotation. These include prepublication announcements; reviews in newspapers, magazines, and professional journals; listings in book digests and similar reference material; the book jacket, table of contents, and index; and the text of the book itself. These materials have varying degrees of usefulness, depending on the nature, importance, and publication date of the book.

Don't plan or write anything until all sources have been consulted!

Reviews—but watch out

Announcements and reviews. Some of the information in prepublication announcements can be useful. The primary sources for such reviews are *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Review,* trade magazines that describe books soon to be published and give information about promotional campaigns that could influence demand.

These reviews are intended for the professional who selects books for a collection. They are not designed to be totally objective about the worth of a book, but instead to alert librarians, booksellers, and other people involved in book selection as to what may be in demand. They contain basic information about the book's content, opinions as to its value, estimates of its potential sales, and suitability for general or specialized collections. For example:

- This book is not up to the author's previous standards but might sell on the strength of the last hit.
- potential hit
- among the most specious of the proliferating publications supposed to offer advice to casualties of the sexual revolution

Specific information cited in a prepublication review can differ from details in the published version. Publishers sometimes change the name of a character, add or remove a subtitle, and even change the title between sending out advance copies for review and going to press.

Critical reviews become available upon or soon after publication; *Library Journal, Book List,* the *Los Angeles Times,* the *Washington Post Book World,* and the *New York Times Book Review* are usual references. Reviews from these sources are for the most part signed articles that indicate the background of the reviewer and the basis for his or her opinions. *Library Journal* reviewers for nonfiction tend to be college faculty or specialists working in the subject area of the book; for fiction they are usually librarians. *Book List* primarily uses its own editorial staff for reviews. The

New York Times often uses reviewers who have written books on similar subjects, or big-name personalities.

Critical reviews are a valuable source of information, but using them requires careful selection of material to transmit to the reader. Information gleaned from reviews must be facts and content, not opinion. Reviews are expected to contain judgments; annotations are not.

Digests—for retrospective selections

Book digests. Reference material of this kind is not sufficiently timely to cover current books, but for older selections such digests can be most helpful. Particularly valuable is *Book Review Digest,* which gives a brief description of the book and lists several excerpts from critical reviews. The Wilson catalogs also use this format. Digests do sometimes contain errors; be sure they are describing the correct book.

Special-interest sources, including both current magazines and cumulative digests, are utilized for some kinds of material, such as books on religion, detective stories, science fiction, literature, and the like.

Book jackets—meant to entice

Book jackets. These summaries are part of the promotion of the book. People browsing through bookstores read them and are tempted into buying (or so the publishers hope). The jackets sometimes contain the best summation of content available anywhere. On the other hand, they sometimes misrepresent content—even characters' names or spellings—or stress sensational elements. Annotation writers should investigate the content of the book before using any book-jacket information. This information should not be ignored, merely approached warily.

Book-jacket information should never be copied for annotations, both because it can be suspect and because the information source will be readily apparent to the reader of the book. For recorded books, after the basic opening announcements (title, author, date, length, reader), the first

thing narrated is the Library of Congress annotation, immediately followed by "from the book jacket." Oops! Cribbing from the book jacket makes nonsense of calling this a Library of Congress annotation.

Paperback blurbs—meant to entice quickly

Paperbacks. Information on the backs of paperbacks is even more suspect than book-jacket information. These books are sold everywhere—newsstands, drugstores, supermarkets—and the publishers want pictures, colors, and words that will catch the attention of a potential buyer who came in to do the weekly shopping or wanted to grab something to read on the bus. The teasers on the backs of paperbacks often have only a remote kinship with the book's contents; they are generally useless for writing annotations.

If the content summary is the only information available, tread warily in using the same words or exact phrases. Generally, the thrust of the book can be indicated without specific plot details. And that content summary will probably be treated on the recording as information from the book jacket and read in its entirety.

The book, the ultimate source—evaluate by skimming

The book. It would not be cost-effective or practical to read every word of every book before writing an annotation. But books do have to be skimmed for content and tone of writing. For nonfiction, the table of contents, introductions, and postscripts are good guides. All books have to be checked carefully for sex, strong language, and violence.

• Common denominators—what the sources indicate

Finding common denominators

Information from all these sources should indicate common elements. If two reviews and the book jacket say that the book is a futuristic science fiction novel, then the book is most likely to be a futuristic science fiction novel. Such fundamental information should set the tone for the annotation.

Isolated points of interest or background facts that one reviewer picks out—but go unmentioned anywhere else—are unlikely to be the main emphasis of the book; these should probably be discounted for use in the annotation. When all this information is considered together, the main idea of the book should be clear. Details on subject, author, theme, plot, setting, and characters can then be selected to flesh out the annotation.

Using well-written phrases from any of these sources is tempting; it's a shame to let good words go to waste. But this procedure is reasonable only if these phrases truly describe the book, deserve emphasis, and fit together. A cut-and-paste job of words lifted out of context can be misleading—or convey no meaning at all.

Select

Select what to include

Content is fundamental

• Determine basic content

A properly written annotation should quickly clue readers to the type of book and its general purpose or approach, leading them to read further if they are interested in this type of material. A misleading annotation may cause a reader to ignore a book that he or she would enjoy—a loss to the reader. Or a misleading annotation may lead to selection of a book that disappoints, making the reader wary about future selections. Either way, the annotation fails in its purpose.

First consider the type of book:

- light reading for pleasure
- practical or how-to guide
- overview of or introduction to a particular subject
- in-depth study
- fiction with a serious theme.

These five categories encompass most of the books for which annotations have to be written. Some types of material are not listed, and some books escape categorization. Annotation writers have to be flexible.

Annotations for books in the first three categories are generally easier to write: their purpose is simple, their construction is rarely complex, and their message is straightforward. Plan to spend more thought—and more time—on the last two categories.

• List (facts)

Jot down notes about the book

Don't arrange them, just make a list. Use the book to verify that names, dates, and places are accurate and correctly spelled. Don't adorn the information; language comes later.

Your notes, unadorned

Notes should cover what is necessary or important about the particular book. They will vary, depending on the type of book. What should be included in the annotation will vary, depending on the category. Notes should cover answers to these questions:

Six questions

- Who is essential to this book?
- What is it about?
- When does it take place?
- Where is it set?
- How is the subject developed?
- Why was it written or is it useful?

These are the six questions drummed into reporters, with a slight revision of emphasis because of the difference in purpose. How does not always need to be answered for a news article; but for books, and therefore annotations, how the author develops his or her idea is what makes one book different from another.

These questions contain the raw material from which annotations are made, even if they do not all have to be answered for every book. Every one should be considered for notes, and some should be selected for the annotation.

• ***Structure notes***

Structure what is to be presented

Structured notes will help the writer build the annotation properly, usually from the general to the specific. They should identify what must be included and ensure that equal concepts are given equal weight. Structuring will prevent omitting the point of the book, distorting the emphasis, or developing one aspect to the exclusion or subordination of others that are equally important. The annotation should

- explain or indicate the book's major emphasis
- include essential but secondary information
- provide supportive detail for interest.

Rank order

Number notes (1), (2), or (3) according to whether facts are major, secondary, or supportive. Many items are supportive details and can be numbered (3); some are essential but secondary and can be numbered (2); only one is a major emphasis, although there can be two items under this heading if there is a premise and a conclusion.

These three categories are enough. Too many groupings and subgroupings are time consuming and will result in an overly complex annotation.

• ***Determine length***

Determine an appropriate length

NLS uses a computer system to track titles through the production cycle from selection through shipment of the braille or recorded versions to network libraries for circulation to readers. The screens for this system were planned to limit the length of each entry to what would fit on the copy-allotment cards for network libraries and bookcards

then in use, automatically adjusting the space for the annotation to accommodate a long title or a subtitle, which could also be long. Therefore, the average annotation was limited to about fifty words. Because long titles or subtitles usually contain information that would otherwise be included in the annotation, a shorter annotation for those books should not be a loss to the reader.

Long titles

The Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrim's Progress; Being Some Account of the Steamship Quaker City's Pleasure Excursion to Europe and the Holy Land, with Description of Countries, Nations, Incidents, and Adventures, as They Appeared to the Author
by Mark Twain

Annotation: A satiric account of a voyage through the Mediterranean and travel in the bordering countries, and a classic study of the differences between Americans and Europeans. 1869.

Comment: nonfiction classic, and Twain had fun with the title

Journal of the Gun Years: Being Choice Selections from the Authentic, Never-Before-Printed Diary of the Famous Gunfighter-Lawman Clay Halser! Whose Deeds of Daring Made His Name a Byword of Terror in the Southwest between the Years of 1866 and 1876!
by Richard Matheson

Annotation: Multicareered Clay Halser's talent with a gun was the stuff of legends. After Halser dies, his journal is discovered. It describes the mortal behind the myth. Violence and some descriptions of sex.

Comment: A western written in 1991. The title is a take-off on the long journal titles popular in the mid-1800s. The author had fun with the exclamation points, too.

When a few words are enough

In many cases, a brief annotation is all that is needed, and there is no need to fill the space just because it is there. Some books can be described with great accuracy in one short, direct statement. In particular, children's books, familiar references, and how-to books often need only a few carefully chosen words.

Galloway
by Louis L'Amour

Annotation: Flagan Sackett finds himself a fugitive in the mountains with only his wits as defense against the Apache warriors and the hungry wolves stalking him.

Comment: The protagonist, the setting, and the conflict are laid out in one sentence. This information is surely enough to entice readers of westerns, if the author's name has not done that already. Yes, the plot could probably be explained more fully, but to what purpose?

The Scott, Foresman Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised
by Henry R. Robert

Annotation: First published in 1876, this manual of parliamentary procedure serves as the country's recognized guide to running and taking effective part in meetings. Revised and modernized.

Comment: Classic reference work, as the title and the annotation state. That's enough.

Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust
by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen

Annotation: Makes the case that the perpetrators of the Jewish genocide were ordinary Germans driven by anti-Semitism and not just military officers and Nazi Party members. Bestseller.

Comment: One sentence lays out the author's thesis succinctly. For elaboration of how he reached that controversial conclusion, read the book.

Note that a few of the examples provided in this manual exceed the fifty-word precept. In general, these annotations were included in the 1979 edition, before the advent of the current computer system and the explosion in printing costs. These annotations have been retained because the points they illustrate are still valid, even though current writers would aim for something shorter. As shown in the previous examples, much shorter is sometimes quite enough. Say what's needed and then stop, rather than strive to fill whatever space is provided.

Choose a writing style to fit the book

Choose appropriate writing style

Consider and convey the author's intent and the mood of the book. A serious study should not sound like a light novel; a light novel should not sound like a philosophical treatise. The tone should enhance the description.

The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western
by Richard Brautigan

Annotation: Romp through a surrealistic world. A young Indian girl wanders into the wrong brothel looking for the right man to kill the monster that lives in the ice caves under the basement of an old house.

Comment: The annotation is almost as surrealistic as the world of the novel. All those phrases would be too much for most books; they are right for this one.

The Human Pedigree
by Anthony Smith

Annotation: A British science reporter confronts the complex medical, legal, and political problems of genetic engineering. He considers such moral questions as whether people with defective genes should

marry and whether seriously defective infants should live.

Comment: Straightforward treatment of a difficult subject with many ramifications. The author's background is given immediately, and *confronts* is an excellent choice for the main verb.

Writing—the last step

Now write

Finally, it's time to turn all that preparation into an annotation. Using the preliminary notes—

- get to the point
- choose appropriate language
- vary sentence structure
- be specific and concise
- watch grammar and punctuation
- adhere to style

While the planning steps are basically consecutive, the elements that make up writing are incorporated largely simultaneously. As soon as you begin writing, language, sentence structure, grammar, and style come into play. That does not mean every sentence or every word will be exactly what is needed on the first draft. The general approach needs to be achieved first and then more attention paid to specific details. But choice of language and how to use it are there from the beginning. The elements are separated here to focus on some fundamentals and considerations.

Get to the point

A strong first sentence sums up or indicates the main emphasis of the book. Supportive details follow.

Get to the point

Edward VIII
by Frances Donaldson
Annotation: Lady Donaldson suggests that Edward VIII's abdication to marry Mrs. Simpson was a willful abandonment of the throne rather than a noble sacrifice. The eldest son of King George V is

portrayed as a tragic personality, the victim of his own flawed character and judgment.

Comment: The opening sentence presents the author's thesis. The second develops it. While active voice is generally preferable, the second sentence works in passive voice with some supporting information on either side of the verb.

Dhalgren
by Samuel R. Delany

Annotation: As the sun grows deadly, the world goes mad. Society perishes, savagery rules, and all that was known is over. In these dying days of Earth, a young drifter enters the city. Explicit descriptions of sex, strong language, and violence.

Comment: The opening sentence presents the situation and sets the mood. The second adds details, opposing the concepts of *society* and *savagery.* The concluding sentence inserts a person into the setting, implying that something is about to happen and enticing the reader to find out what that is. The warning tags indicate that the action may not be to everyone's taste.

• The first sentence sets the tone

That vital first sentence

The opening sentence lets the reader know immediately what this book is about.

For nonfiction, the information could include the author's premise or approach, the time period covered, a succinct introduction to the subject matter, a brief statement of the author's credentials, or whatever else is essential to the particular book. Note that the statement must indicate something about the book, not just about the person or situation covered in the book.

For fiction, the first sentence should capture the mood, and could introduce the major character(s), set the plot in motion, or anchor the book in place and time, along with

leading the reader into the next sentence for more information. Sometimes it needs to state the nature of the book, usually for genres that are hard to depict through plot and mood. Not all these elements should be included in every first sentence; the writer must select what is essential to this book. Remember that some information has already appeared in the title.

• ***Good***

Good starts

Obviously there can be as many good beginnings as there are books being annotated.

Fragments of the Ark
by Lousie Meriwether

First sentence: Peter Mango has been a slave all his life.

Comment: Identifies the protagonist and his situation, and at the same time implies that something is about to happen to change things.

Next Time, She'll Be Dead:
Battering and How to Stop It
by Ann Jones

First sentence: A study of the institutions and attitudes that foster the problem of domestic violence in America.

Comment: Straightforward exposition about what the book contains. There are five useful nouns *(study, institutions, attitudes, problem, violence)* and a well-chosen verb that has the sense of giving aid to a situation that should be halted, not encouraged.

The Last Integrationist
by Jake Lamar

First sentence: A political tale set in a racially divided America.

Comment: Both the genre and the subject are hinted at in the title. The explanatory opening sentence

clarifies the direction of the novel, leading to plot elements to follow.

Always try to get directly to the author's approach for nonfiction books. Some possibilities include:

- A behind-the-scenes look
- Reminiscences about
- A personal and political discussion
- Interviews with [whomever] demonstrate
- An investigative reporter examines
- A discursive, detailed biography
- Techno-thriller author Tom Clancy provides an in-depth look
- A multifaceted reflection on
- Williams ponders
- Explanation of
- The authors' architectural engineering backgrounds and personal experience inform their descriptions of earthquakes and volcanos.
- The authors define
- The authors discuss
- The author highlights
- The authors assert
- The author focuses
- The author tells how
- The author describes

- Richards outlines the life of
- Traces
- More than two hundred [people] contributed their recollections to
- A broad survey
- According to two proponents of Darwinian medicine, the body is a bundle of compromises
- Literary biography of
- Literary notable remembers
- A musicologist's documented account
- Sociology professor criticizes
- Myers states he does not possess final answers to the mysteries of well-being
- A reporter's account of
- Presents frank views
- Critical biography of
- Opposed to manipulating people by interfering with their decision-making processes, …

• Trouble

Watch out for these approaches

What's in the book?

Don't ignore the book. Annotations are about books, not about the people profiled or the conflict covered. The first sentence for a nonfiction book should always indicate what the book is about (life of, discusses, covers), not what the subject did, why he or she did it, or how the author became interested. This problem is particularly prevalent with biographies.

More pitfalls

Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman
by Kathleen Krull

Annotation: African American Wilma Rudolph weighed only four pounds when she was born in 1940, and she had nineteen older brothers and sisters. Childhood polio left her leg paralyzed, but Wilma exercised until she not only walked but became an Olympic gold medal runner. For grades 2-4.

Problem: Needs an introductory sentence stating that the book tells how the person profiled surmounted many difficulties to become an Olympic gold medal winner. The details listed should intrigue children, but they are supportive information rather than the starting point.

Little Girl Fly Away
by Gene Stone

Annotation: For four years Ruth Finley said she was stalked by a man who, on different occasions, kidnapped her, stabbed her, harassed her by phone, and wrote her evil poetry. The Poet eluded Wichita police until the chief, who had not met Ruth, read the voluminous file and solved the case by surveillance: Ruth was stalking herself. After five years of psychoanalytic therapy, Ruth was able to understand why. Strong language and some violence.

Problem: We have a lengthy annotation about the case, its solution, and even the outcome for the perpetrator. There's nothing anywhere about the book, which can only be presumed to present this information somehow.

The author's motivation is secondary, or even unnecessary

Don't concentrate just on background. This problem is another common aspect of ignoring the book. An annotation should cover the approach of the book, not explain how the author happened to write it. These facts can be

included as supportive details if pertinent, but the first sentence should always indicate that there is a book.

Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap
by Peggy Orenstein

Annotation: When journalist Orenstein read the American Association of University Women's (AAUW) 1990 study that told of widespread low self-esteem in young girls, she wanted to learn about the people and the stories behind the statistics. With the support of AAUW, she spent a year observing this trait in eighth-grade girls from two California schools, chosen to reflect the system-wide division by race and economic class.

Problem: It's all background. Not only is there no book, there's no substance about any findings from the study.

Of Love and Other Demons
by Gabriel García Márquez

First sentence: In 1949, the author was instructed by his newspaper editor to go to the old convent of Santa Clara on the Caribbean coast and see if he could come up with a story about the emptying of their burial crypts prior to building a hotel.

Problem: More than half of the allotted fifty words have been used, and we have no information about what is in the book. The opening sentence or two should be devoted to setting, characters, and story line of a fiction book. If there is space, background information could be added briefly: *This novel was inspired by a 1949 visit…* Readers might be intrigued to learn that a 1995 bestseller was based on an experience almost half a century earlier—but only if they first had some reason to become interested in the book.

The title says it

Don't repeat title information. Use the annotation to give new information; limited space shouldn't be used to repeat what can be learned from the title and subtitle. Repetition is dull in print, wasteful in braille, and deadly when recorded.

Rebecca West: A Celebration
by Rebecca West
First sentence: Selections from the works of Dame Rebecca West.
Comment: The author's name already appears twice in the bibliographic material; a third appearance in the annotation is both unnecessary and boring.

The Misbegotten Son: A Serial Killer and His Victims; the True Story of Arthur J. Shawcross
by Jack Olsen
First sentence: Reconstruction of crimes committed by Arthur John Shawcross.
Comment: All that is in the lengthy subtitle. The first sentence should be used to tell how many murders, over what period of time, how grizzly or inexplicable, how long it took for him to be discovered—anything that is more than what is already stated. Is there something in his family background to explain the title?

Many works of nonfiction are quite specific in the title and subtitle about the subject covered and the time. Obviously, then, these facts do not need to be included in the annotation. Instead, the first sentence should focus on other elements, possibly a fuller explanation of who the subject is, what he or she accomplished or is known for, the approach or credentials of the author, or how this book differs from others on the subject.

Repetition is rarely a problem with fiction titles.

Don't creep up on the real words

Avoid wordy opening phrases. It's superfluous to start with a book about; the reader knows that it is a book about something. Moreover, such an opening phrase almost insists that the writer add descriptive adjectives about the book, and these can too easily become judgmental. Instead, go directly to the content: someone doing something.

> *Wordy:* Warm, sympathetic story of the seven restless and ambitious children of a pre-depression Jewish immigrant family as they pursue power and wealth.
>
> *Direct:* Seven restless and ambitious children of a pre-depression Jewish family pursue power and wealth.

Beware of such phrases as:

Avoid

- The story of
- Here is a story of
- This is a horror story about
- This novel chronicles
- This little book is made up of
- Here in his own words is a story of
- Author's account of
- This novel concerns
- An intriguing novel in which (also a value judgment)
- A touching, funny novel (two value judgments)
- Gothic/historical/science fiction/western/contemporary/mystery/suspense novel that

The annotation usually should start with the information that comes after such phrases. Spell out the genre only if it isn't obvious. The annotation's tone and content are the best

means for conveying the type of book. The reader can tell that it's a historical novel if the time period and setting are given; that it's a gothic novel if the heroine is being pursued around a spooky mansion on the edge of a cliff overlooking the moors.

Cases where the genre can be in doubt often involve some form of humor where the action depicted is intended to illustrate a point, as in a satire. Here it is preferable to begin with a statement about what is being satirized and use the plot elements for supportive details—which is what they are: the author's means of making the point.

Biting the Wall
by J.M. Johnson
First sentence: In this satire on academic life, Llew McQuilla is summarily removed from his job as head of computer services at Wilbur Moody College, and his loyal colleagues are determined to learn the reason behind this sudden demotion.
Comment: Without the opening phrase, the plot information could be read straight, possibly as the introduction to a serious conspiracy.

I Killed Hemingway
by William McCranor Henderson
First sentence: Satirical thriller about former Hemingway scholar Elliot McGuire, who is asked to ghostwrite the biography of elder Eric "Pappy" Markham.
Comment: The opening phrase tells the reader to expect a suspense novel with comic twists.

The Ditches of Edison County
by Ronald Richard Roberts
First sentence: This parody of the bestselling *Bridges of Madison County (RC 35861)* also features a brief affair between a traveling photographer,

Ronald Concave, and a farmer's lonely wife, Pancetta Jackson.

Comment: The title, with its echoes of the original runaway bestseller and film, announces a takeoff. Identifying the book as a parody reinforces this fact, as does the plot information. The connections may not be so obvious as *Bridges* fades from memory.

There's a point here somewhere

Avoid overcrowding. An overcrowded first sentence cannot focus attention on any one point, and readers may get totally confused or lose interest. Overcrowding is bad practice anywhere, but it can be a disaster in the opening sentence.

The Terrible Teague Bunch
by Gary Jennings

Annotation: (1) Comic western (2) set in Texas, (3) at the turn of the century in which (4) four well-intentioned badmen (5) encounter (6) rough obstacles and (7) rough luck (8) en route (9) to robbing a train (10) carrying money (11) to a new bank (12) at Teague.

Comment: Twelve separate thoughts are stuffed into one sentence. Most of the information is useful and fairly well expressed, but there is too much in one place. Run-on thoughts are a challenge even to the inveterate reader of westerns.

No padding

Never use throwaways. These are sentences that lead into the information that should be conveyed, but contain no information of their own about the book. They create the impression that the writer didn't quite know how to get to the point, or was trying to stretch the material and fill up the space.

The Doctor's Book of Home Remedies: Thousands of Tips and Techniques Anyone Can Use to Heal Everyday Health Problems
by Deborah Tkac

First sentence: Have you ever wondered what a doctor does when he gets a cold, is plagued with arthritis, snores, or has a stomachache?

Comment: The sentence is wasted—words thrown away that could have been used for imparting information. Readers should not be addressed as you, and what they may have wondered is immaterial. The book does not need a long annotation; the title is quite explicit.

Add supportive details

Second sentence builds

The second sentence (and others as necessary) should clarify the introductory sentence if needed, add specifics, identify the conflict, or move the plot along. The type of book and its approach will determine what is needed.

Long Ago in France: The Years in Dijon
by M.F.K. Fisher

Annotation: An account of the years between 1929 and 1931, when the author is introduced to life in France. For her it is a time when practically everything is new—marriage, the French language, and culinary interests. Most exciting of all are the people in the cafes, movies, shops, and kitchens and in the pensions she and her husband share with other foreigners and graduate students in the provincial city of Dijon.

Comment: The first sentence is short and straightforward, showing that the book contains memoirs (*an account*), clarifying the years encompassed by the *long ago* of the title, and indicating new experiences with *introduced to*. The details that follow reflect the emerging concerns of the well-known food writer and add color.

The Dutchman
by Maan Meyers

Annotation: (1) New Amsterdam, 1664. (2) This city of Dutch settlers, Indians, and Jewish merchants is about to be attacked by the British. (3) But Schout (sheriff) Pieter Tonneman has other problems to worry about first. (4) A close friend has apparently killed himself, a Jewish family's house has been burned, a corpse disappears and reappears, and a lovely Jewish widow has a special interest in him. Strong language and some violence.

Comment: (1) A dateline with place and time is a good way to identify a historical work; it saves space and words along with reducing the dependence on prepositional phrases. Like all devices, however, it should not be overused. (2) The first full sentence enlarges on the background and setting and also introduces one plot element. (3) The hero appears in the next sentence, along with indications of more plot complications. (4) Finally, there is an overwhelming series of personal concerns and criminal activities designed to keep a conscientious lawman occupied for quite some time. Note how well the details build.

• ***Know how to stop***

Know how to stop

A good paragraph, or a good annotation, should have a beginning, a middle, and an end—but not necessarily in three sentences and not usually revealing the outcome of the book. When there is enough information to lay out the author's thesis or pique the reader's interest, there is no need to add more. Particularly with annotations for escapist fiction titles, it is enough to get the protagonists into a situation or dilemma and stir concern about how they will deal with it. The annotation should not, of course, disclose the ending. It also does not need to summarize all the action leading to the conclusion.

Don't tell all

Don't disclose too much plot. Once the situation has been laid out, trying to encapsulate all of the action can lead to complex, convoluted sentences that confuse rather than enlighten. And too much information can weaken the thrust, leaving the annotation to trail off, rather than end on an interesting note.

Seasons of the Heart RC 24280
by Cynthia Freeman

Annotation: Ann Coulter's dreams of a happy, prosperous future with her husband, Phillip, a dashing, aristocratic lawyer she met at her best friend's wedding, are shattered by World War II. His internment throughout the war in a Japanese prison camp saps his strength of character. Ann's determination to improve the family finances by working as a realtor turns her into a millionaire, **but the marriage fails.**

Comment: The first sentence is long and filled with details that seem to lead into a light romance. Since that is not to be the case, the allusion to *her best friend's wedding* should be eliminated to connect *dreams* and *shattered* more directly. The middle section covers a fairly long period of time, with both people facing realities—his very grim and hers of ambition and achievement. Then the whole thing ends abruptly and with finality, leaving very little reason for reading the book.

Don't flounder

Avoid weak generalizations. The concluding sentence should arouse interest in some way, not trail off into a vague nothingness. This situation can be caused by too much attention to how the author sets up the plot, leaving little space to focus on how it develops.

Sound the Trumpet: The Liberty Bell, Book 1
by Gilbert Morris

Annotation: When British Daniel and Lyna Bradford lose their mother, going to a workhouse is

their only option. Fortunately, they are hired by Lord Rochester to work as indentured servants for five years, and life is good. Then young Leo Rochester makes passes at Lyna, and Daniel fights with him and must leave. Both Daniel and Lyna will endure many hardships before they are reunited in America. Some violence.

Problem: Most of the book is encompassed in the vague *endure many hardships* of the last sentence, which surely is not going to inspire much interest, especially since the tagline indicates violence. This problem occurs mainly because too much attention has been given to details of the opening situation, many of them unnecessary. *Going to a workhouse* is obviously not their only option, since they didn't. This annotation could easily begin with a sentence such as "Orphaned siblings Daniel and Lyna are separated after being indentured to Lord Rochester," leaving more space to lay out something about the action.

Don't question the obvious

Don't pose useless questions. The annotation should not dissolve into meaningless speculation about whether the characters will achieve their purpose. Questions to which the answer is obvious add no information.

- *Will she make the right choice?* Of course she will. It's a romance novel.
- *Can they keep the world from going up in flames?* You bet. There will be heroics first, however.
- *Will the twins find their mother in all that jungle?* Without doubt.

Generally, the writer should stop with the sentence that precedes these questions. If the problem has not been set out, as it probably should have been, the situation is much better handled with a statement:

- She has to determine the right choice for her.
- If they fail, the world will go up in flames.
- A dense jungle lies between the lost twins and their mother.

Questions can be used to good effect, but they should be used sparingly and should not express the obvious. (*See* Writing—the last step, p. 84.)

Choose appropriate language

Now select words

Language is chosen before it is written, even though the two acts may seem to be simultaneous; writers decide what word to use before they write it down. Language for annotations should be interesting, appropriate, and nonjudgmental. Words chosen should fulfill two related objectives. They should

- transmit specific content
- capture the flavor of the book.

Every word in an annotation should be valuable. Readers don't have infinite time or patience to wait for the point to be made; length is a consideration for selection cards and bookcards; space for printing, brailling, and recording annotations is limited.

Before selecting words, consider some aspects of language.

• Verbs for action

Verbs

Verbs are action words; they describe what happens. Annotations that relate something happening are much more interesting than those that generalize about background or contents. Use active voice for vigor, boldness, and brevity. Choose one tense, preferably present.

Life after Life
by Raymond A. Moody Jr.

Annotation: A philosopher-doctor (1) synthesizes the experiences of more than fifty people who (2) have been declared clinically dead and then (2) resuscitated. Their similar accounts (3) suggest to the author existence after death.

Alive

Comment: (1) Main verb of the sentence—active voice and present tense. The word is well chosen for the act of putting many things together. (2) Verbs for the dependent clause show action before that of the main verb. Words have the precise meaning intended. (3) Main verb of sentence—active voice and present tense. Gives immediacy to the theme of the book, even though the author considered and chose his topic before he began writing.

The Romance of Atlantis
by Taylor Caldwell

Annotation: According to the author, this novel (1) was written when she was twelve and (1) based (2) on her former life in Atlantis.

Dead

Comment: (1) Compound verb; passive voice, past tense. Creates little interest. (2) Nothing happens in this annotation, although the last phrase and the title hint that something happened in the author's life or imagination that may be reflected in the book.

These two annotations are on similar subjects. The first one creates interest and the other kills it. The difference lies with the care taken in selection of facts and use of verbs to describe them.

• Nouns for identity

Nouns

Nouns identify who and what. Choose nouns to incorporate as much information as possible, since brevity is a necessity and precision aids interest. Bachelor is better than unmarried man. Nouns that incorporate a description convey vitality

through succinctness; they also leave space for adjectives that add more force or new information.

The Case of the Glamorous Ghost
by Erle Stanley Gardner

Annotation: (1) Amnesia, (1) blackmail, and (1) jewel-smuggling provide the (2) background for a (2) murder in which (3) Perry Mason, for once, knows less than the (3) prosecutor.

Comment: (1) The sentence has a triple subject; the three nouns sum up the elements of the plot. (2) These two nouns continue to set the scene. (3) These two nouns identify the conflict: the protagonist by well-known name and the antagonist by function. This short annotation uses seven nouns; most of the remaining words provide connections. What more is needed for a Perry Mason mystery?

Use care with

Names. Using proper nouns, names of people and places, requires careful consideration. The foremost concern is accuracy; places and characters should be identified correctly and spellings checked. Obviously, people featured in nonfiction works need to be identified by name and often also by title or function, place, and date. Places are usually essential.

Run, River, Run: A Naturalist's Journey down One of the Great Rivers of the West
by Ann Zwinger

Annotation: Detailed descriptions of the (4) sights, (4) smells, and (4) sensations of the magnificent (1) Green River from its (2) source in Wyoming to its (2) confluence with the Colorado in Utah. (3) Zwinger covered all (2) 730 miles of the river on (5) foot and by (5) canoe, (5) raft, and (5) plane.

Comment: (1) With that title and subtitle, the river has to be named. (2) Further definition is needed—where and how long? (3) The author must be identified as the naturalist of the title; she could have been

writing about someone else. (4) Alliterative summation of sensory phenomena and immediate mood of the book. Note that the descriptive words on content come before the identification of the place—despite the questions raised in the title: What river? Where? (5) Supportive detail completes the picture. Good use of simple nouns throughout.

Character names should not be used if they are common; readers don't gain much information from John and Mary. A descriptive phrase would have the advantage of telling something about the person that relates to development of the plot (New York detective, gun-shy cowboy, heiress to coal-baron's fortune). On the other hand, familiar characters should always be identified if their names aren't included in the title information; readers may need to see that this book features Sherlock Holmes or a member of Louis L'Amour's Sackett family.

The Secret Box
by Gayle Pearson

Annotation: Five interconnected stories about Taylor Finch and her sixteen-year-old brother, Toby, and Lindsay, thirteen, and her brother, Eric, who is also sixteen. In the title story, Taylor receives a secret box for her twelfth birthday, but thinks the thirty-four steps to open it are too much trouble—until she realizes she has some secrets she wants to hide. For grades 4-7.

Comment: There is no reason to identify these characters by name. Only one is referred to later in the annotation, and sorting them all out, including ages, produces an awkward sentence without much interest.

Rewritten: Five interconnected stories about two girls and their sixteen-year-old brothers.

Sleeping Murder
by Agatha Christie

Annotation: In this, her last case, Miss Marple warns a charming young couple…

Comment: The name is important; mystery fans will want to know which of Agatha Christie's famous sleuths is featured.

Sometimes place or character names add interest: if they suggest a nationality or an ethnic group that is being portrayed, if they are somehow related to the title, or if they simply sound as if they belong to this character or this book.

The Lion's Paw
by D.R. Sherman

Annotation: A young bushman in the Kalahari Desert befriends a trapped lion and is caught in a deadly conflict with nature and an obsessed white safari hunter.

Remember sound

Comment: The exact place is not absolutely necessary; Africa is clearly suggested by the rest of the content. But the unusual nature of the setting and the sound of the word *Kalahari* add mystery and interest. Don't forget sound. Note that neither the bushman nor the hunter is named; the description is enough.

Chancy
by Louis L'Amour

Annotation: Young (3) drifter (1) Otis Chancy takes his (2) chances against (3) crooked sheriffs, (3) deadly gunmen, and (3) renegade Indians.

Comment: (1) Shows that the title is the name of the hero. (2) A small play on words that should not be overdone. (3) Note the fine parallel use of descriptive adjectives. Names are unnecessary except for the title character.

Exile of the Stars
by Andre Norton

Annotation: (1) Krip Vorland and (1) Maelen of the free trader ship (1) *Lydis* are forced to land with a priceless treasure on the (2) supposedly uninhabited planet of (1) Sekhmet.

Comment: (1) The unusual names enhance the exotic nature of the subject. (2) Note the hint of things to come in *supposedly uninhabited.*

Sometimes character names are a necessity. If the annotation would otherwise dissolve into mysterious pronouns and obscure references, use names—interesting or not—for comprehension.

Leave a Message for Willie:
A Sharon McCone Mystery
By Marcia Muller

Annotation: Willie Whelan is a vendor at the Saltflats Flea Market near Brisbane. He also works as a fence—and someone thinks he knows something about some missing Torahs. A man wearing a yarmulke has been hanging around his stall for about three weeks, and he has asked Sharon McCone to investigate. But Sharon has hardly gotten her investigation under way when the man, Jerry Levin, is murdered.

Watch antecedents

Comment: Willie's name is necessary, both to identify the title character and because at least one other man appears in the annotation. All the masculine pronouns are meant to refer to Willie, but grammatically some of them don't; the antecedent is in one case *someone* and in another *the man wearing the yarmulke*, who may or may not be the *someone*. Willie's name will have to be used in place of the pronouns or the sentences rewritten. The man's identity wasn't known earlier and could be omitted. However, the ethnic name ties him in with the yarmulke and the missing Torahs, and so adds interest.

Be careful to use names consistently within an annotation. Assuming the full name has been given at first reference, generally last names are preferable for the next mention. This practice will not work, however, when the characters are related and two or more have the same last name. And sometimes the first names are the ones that set the tone or provide interest. In any case, don't use first names for some characters and last names for others. In particular, don't use strong-sounding surnames for men and frivolous or uninteresting ones for women, even if the book does. (*See* Sensitivities, p. 34).

• Adjectives for dimension

Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns and are next in importance to nouns and verbs. Their purpose is to refine definition, infuse color, and add dimension to a noun. Some nouns with carefully selected adjectives can almost tell the story:

- lonely, mute boy + homeless, intelligent mongrel
- seasoned detective + strange rituals + sinister cult

Adjectives set or sum up the tone:

To set the tone

- *Annotation:* Begins with an aged and weary King Arthur (Opening phrase about *The Book of Merlyn*, by T.H. White, a sequel to *The Once and Future King*)
- *Comment: Aged and weary* presents a vivid picture; for those familiar with the youthful apprehensions that opened the earlier book, they provide a striking comparison.
- Annotation: …flamboyant Richard Coeur de Lion and his exquisite queen (Summing up *The Passionate Brood*, by Margaret Campbell, a historical novel about the Crusades and the early Plantagenet kings of England.)

- *Comment: Flamboyant* is appropriate to Richard's activities and style; *exquisite* denotes someone dainty and provides contrast. Note how flat the sentence would be without the adjectives.

Adjectives add color.

April Lady
by Georgette Heyer
Annotation: Light novel set in Regency England. To help such (1) deserving people as (3) her (2) dashing, debt-ridden brother and (3) her husband's (2) lovesick young sister, Lady Helen continually tells little white lies. One fib too many puts her marriage in jeopardy.

To add color

Comment: (1) *Deserving people* sets up an image that is

(2) Immediately counteracted by *dashing, debt-ridden brother* and *lovesick young sister*, presenting quite a different picture and underscoring the irony of the first adjective. (3) Simple words give definition and hint at something about the plot; one of these relatives is hers and one is his.

To judge (no!)

Adjectives that judge. Adjectives should not be used to make explicit judgments about books. What reviewers or annotation writers find *lively* may be deadly to readers. Reaction to a book depends on interest in the subject, background brought to it, and often mood of the moment. These factors cannot be assessed for readers. (*See* Judgments, p. 36.)

Avoid phrases like these:

- pleasant introduction to
- sensitive novel about
- colorful account

- powerful collection
- enthusiastic, lively, reverent account
- unique, interesting commentary
- a touching, funny novel
- perceptive insights into (redundant as well as judgmental)
- warm, sympathetic story
- engaging account
- charming portrait
- fascinating stories of
- moving and lucid biography
- engrossing tale of
- poignant story of
- riveting novel about
- gripping account

and all similar adjectives that prejudge.

To describe (yes!)

Adjectives that describe. On the other hand, descriptive adjectives can and often should be used to identify an author's approach or attitude. The key word is "descriptive"; the writer does not judge the success of the effort.

- sympathetic treatment (The author is "for" whatever is being discussed)
- revisionary history (Content runs counter to what has been the prevailing thought)

- controversial approach (Other books may say just the opposite)
- light approach (Don't expect profundities)
- in-depth study (There's more meat here)
- critical portrait (The author is not "for" whoever is being discussed)

Dossier: The Secret History of Armand Hammer
by Edward J. Epstein

Annotation: An *unflattering portrait* of the noted American industrialist, philanthropist, and alleged agent for the Soviet Union. Drawing on official American and Soviet records, extensive interviews, and secretly taped conversations, the author *describes a man given to duplicity and ambition*.

Comment: A well-rounded annotation presenting immediately the author's approach to his subject and ending with specifics that expand on his negative attitude. In between, the subject is identified succinctly, as are the sources of information.

• Small words

Small words

Little words mean a lot! But in the struggle to get words right—interesting nouns, active verbs, precise and colorful adjectives—articles and words that connect or introduce phrases can get insufficient attention.

Articles—a, an, the

Articles. English utilizes three articles. *A* and *an* are indefinite; *the* is definite. *Indefinite* and *definite* are not just grammar-book names; they point out a function. Articles are not interchangeable, and they are overused.

A and *an* indicate that the subject is one of a group—any one. Often such a relationship is understood, and the article is unnecessary.

The presents more problems. It shows uniqueness—that particular one. It also indicates a totality—all of them. Be careful when using this simple word that you don't imply that the book covers every aspect of this situation, every historical event in the time frame, or every possibility for discussion.

Example: …describes **the** adjustments made by plant and animal species to perpetuate themselves in their inhospitable environment (from a nonfiction work about deserts, but it could apply to any place where plants or animals are in trouble).

Comment: The adjustments implies that every possibility is covered, an unlikely circumstance in any scientific field. The force of the annotation is not diminished if the article is omitted; the content is suspect if it is included.

Conjunctions—and, or, but

Conjunctions. These connecting words make a relationship clear. *And* indicates that elements go together, *or* shows choice or disparity, *but* introduces an exception or condition. *And/or* has crept into use but not into the dictionary; options that are compatible at some point and divergent at others can usually be expressed differently and better.

Or is straightforward and rarely misused; it indicates that one of two or more things happen or are involved, but not all of them.

Sentence: By following their suggestions, a person can avoid investing in companies that manufacture weapons, test products on animals, use environmentally unsound packaging, **or** exploit minorities.

Comment: The reader can identify companies involved in any one of these four practices.

Sentence: …and joining, staying in, **or** leaving the work force.

Comment: Lists three options that are mutually exclusive.

Sentence: Was it fate **or** was it an act of God?
Comment: The characters have to ponder about this.

Sentence: Xar, lord of the Nexus and now lord of Abarrach, wants to control the Seventh Gate, which will give him the power to unite **or** destroy the worlds of air, fire, stone, and water.
Comment: There's a big difference between *uniting* and *destroying.*

And is concerned with similarities rather than differences. Writers have to be careful about uniting two clauses with *and* unless they are really connected and relatively equal in importance. One event that follows, or is dependent on, another is better introduced by a phrase or clause that indicates the relationship:

- After the war, they… (**not** The war ends and they…)
- Because their sun is dying, the Klingons… (**not** Their sun is dying and…)
- When he learns the truth, the master spy… (**not** The master spy learns the truth and…)
- In spite of her terror, Monica… (**not** Monica is terrified and…)
- Desperate for love, the young queen… (**not** The young queen is desperate for love and…)
- Abandoning hope of rescue, the castaways… (**not** The castaways abandon hope of rescue and…)

Similarly, *but* should be used primarily for two things that are equal. *But* could be substituted for *and* in any of the examples above, depending on the information that follows.

Within an annotation, sentence structure needs to vary for interest, so not all information can or should be conveyed through dependent clauses. The equality of the information is largely the determining factor for using conjunctions.

Prepositions. These words lead to qualifying phrases. Many prepositions are visually short, only two letters (*to, by*), and simple in sound, having only one or two syllables (*through, below*). Although these small and familiar words are not interchangeable, several of them can be used in somewhat the same sense. *Of*, the most common preposition, has twelve major definitions—with up to four submeanings under these headings—in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993). An annotation that used *of* for all, or even a large fraction, of its possible meanings would be infinitely monotonous. Strive for variety and the most precise meaning. Avoid overuse, which leads to long, rambling sentences.

Prepositions—not always short

Because of the tendency to equate prepositions with short, writers tend to get edgy and wonder if they're being pedantic when considering prepositions longer than five letters. Actually, English utilizes many prepositions, not all of them short; many longer ones are in common usage and not at all obscure in meaning. Several, called phrasal prepositions, consist of more than one word.

A list of prepositions for selection:

about	apart from	at
above	apropos of	barring
according to	around	because of
across	as against	before
after	as between	behind
along	as compared with	below
along with	as for	beneath
alongside of	aside from	beside
amid	as regards	besides
among	as to	between

beyond	in addition to	past
by	in back of	pending
by dint of	in behalf of	regarding
by means of	in case of	regardless of
by reason of	in comparison to	round
by way of	in consideration of	round about
concerning	in default of	short of
considering	in front of	since
contrary to	in lieu of	through
despite	in place of	throughout
down	in preference to	till
due to	in regard to	to
during	in spite of	toward
ere	inside	under
except	instead of	underneath
except for	into	until
excepting	like	unto
for	near	up
from	of	up to
from above	off	upon
from among	on	versus
from around	on account of	via
from behind	on behalf of	with
from beneath	onto	within
from between	opposite to	without
from over	out of	with regard to
from under	outside	with respect to
in	over	with reference to
in accordance with	owing to	with the exception of

It's Disgusting—and We Ate It! True Food Facts from around the World—and throughout History (Note the double preposition, *from around*, and the long one, *throughout.*)

Some constructions almost always use a particular preposition. Grammatically, things are always *different from*, not *different than*—a very common error that uses the wrong

part of speech. *Words into Type (Third Edition, Completely Revised,* Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974, pp. 432-446) lists several hundred words with one or more appropriate prepositions. Where more than one preposition can be used, the meaning usually differs with the one selected; for example, *interfere in* something, but *interfere with* someone.

Note that some of the words listed as prepositions can also be other parts of speech, depending on their function in the sentence.

• ***Language traps***

Language traps

Be careful about

- any word that has more than one meaning. Since means both because of and from the time of; examples of its misuse are legion. Substitute another word or construction unless the meaning is unmistakable.

Take care

- words that can be used as more than one part of speech. That description applies to many words that writers cannot, and should not, always avoid.

These words have different pronunciations:

- *read* (present and past tense of the same verb)
- *project* (noun and verb)
- *separate* (adjective and verb)
- *record* (noun and verb)

These common words have the same pronunciation:

- *gain* (noun and verb)
- *mandate* (noun and verb)
- *light* (noun, adjective, and verb)
- *like* (verb, noun, adjective, preposition, adverb)

Obviously, such words cannot be prohibited for annotations, but the context must make their meaning clear.

Can You Trust Your Bank?
by Robert Heller and Morris Willatt
Annotation: A study of the world's banks documents what went wrong…
Problem: Documents is intended as a verb (*a study … documents*), but the statement has to be read several times and the punctuation examined carefully before that is clear. The reader's tendency is to consider *documents* as a collection of official-looking papers. Reading that phrase would try the most professional and dedicated narrator.

Watch out for:

Avoid:

- **redundancies.** *Dead corpse* is overdoing it. A corpse or a body found someplace is assumed to be dead; it's inherent in the noun. Case histories are assumed to be *actual;* if they are fictionalized, that needs to be stated.

- **clichés.** Some words have been used together so often that they no longer have any meaning. All *ends* are not *bitter*, *apologies* can be something other than *abject*, and not all *horses* have to be *dark*. Such phrases are sometimes appropriate for a formula-written book that is in itself a cliché; they have no place in the description of a classic, either established or potential.

- **obscure words.** The purpose is communication. Scouring the dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedia, and other references is good practice for writers; these sources may lead to the exact word for the concept to be expressed. Using unfamiliar words in the annotation, however, is bad practice. Readers need to understand what is being communicated.

- **literary allusions.** Annotation writers can't assume that readers know other books or references; there should be some explanatory phrase.

Vary sentence structure

Variety adds interest

Variety makes reading and listening interesting. Short sentences should be mingled with longer ones. Sentence fragments are acceptable if the meaning is clear. Questions, exclamations, and quotations can occasionally add interest.

Annotation: A cat is kidnapped because he is the cherished stablemate of a thoroughbred racehorse who performs well only when the cat is around. The catnap job is assigned to Bertie!

Annotation: Will easy-riding cowboy Hewey Calloway finally settle down? He realizes that a new era is coming to Texas in the early years of the century, but he doesn't want to change with it.

Annotation: Shakespeare's best-known plays are presented in a new, humorous light, the old light having blown a fuse.

Comment: All of these annotations present the tone and the thrust of the book in a few carefully selected words. There is no need to summarize plots, although another sentence with supportive details could be added to each one as long as the tone is maintained. Note that the first two alternate a long sentence with a short, simple one. The third example uses a short quote in the last clause for an abrupt change in direction.

• Parallel construction—keep like things like

Parallel construction

Keep parallel thoughts parallel in construction. Use a verb throughout or omit throughout. Use the same tense and approximately the same length for each thought.

Annotation: The junior senator from New York, elected on the Conservative Party ticket, presents his political views. He analyzes the Constitution, advo-

cates less centralized government, observes the loss of American productivity, and comments on the dangers of isolation.

Comment: The second sentence, with supportive details, lists four major tenets presented, each about the same length and each introduced by an active verb that delineates the difference in approach.

The Brontës
by Juliet Barker

Annotation: Barker draws on eleven years' research to compile this detailed, documented reinterpretation of the nineteenth-century family of writers. Contrasting her findings with conclusions of previous biographers, Barker presents the father, Patrick, as a sympathetic patriarch; brother Branwell as a talented, though tortured, poet; and authors Charlotte, Emily, and Anne as strong, not oppressed, women.

Comment: A fine annotation introducing both the subject and the unusual approach in the first sentence, along with the author's credentials. The second sentence spells out how the subjects are treated. Note the parallel structure of elements in the second sentence, where three individuals or groups are identified, named, and characterized. Also note that semicolons are properly used to separate the sections with interior commas.

• Complex sentences can obscure meaning

Complex sentences

Avoid overlong and overcomplex sentences. They make the reader search for the meaning and can pave the way for grammatical errors.

Unacceptable: Former Scotland Yard detective John Raven becomes involved with a Polish con man whom he knew years before to help denounce a fellow Pole whom he suspects of spying for the KGB.

Comment: It's hard to tell how many people are involved here, much less who did what to whom.

Questions

Questions can enhance meaning

Questions can effectively introduce the situation or summarize the problems. As discussed earlier (*see* Get to the Point, p. 66), they should not be used to state what is already obvious or as a way to get out.

The Neandertal Enigma:
Solving the Mystery of Modern Human Origins
by James Shreeve

Annotation: Science writer Shreeve surveys evidence and theories on the origins of modern humankind. Drawing on his travels to sites where the oldest human remains have been found, his interviews with foremost anthropologists, and a weighing of discoveries, Shreeve points to Neandertals as the central mystery of human evolution. Did our species evolve from, interbreed with, or replace Neandertals?

Comment: The words *enigma* and *mystery* in the title make it clear that this book is dealing with a question. Most of the annotation deals with credentials and methodology, which are valuable for giving credence to evidence presented on such a large and controversial subject. The points raised are still in question, and it is appropriate for the final sentence to express them in that form.

Mischief: A Novel of the 87th Precinct
by Ed McBain

Annotation: Could the man who is blowing away graffiti artists as they perform their peculiar brand of mischief be the same person who is gunning down annoying kids and inept counter help? The men in blue must also deal with their own mischief maker—the Deaf Man, last heard from in *Eight Black Horses (RC 23671)*—who keeps calling with

clues to his latest scheme. Strong language, violence, and explicit descriptions of sex.

Comment: The introductory question sums up one of the problems being tackled, and with a good series of nouns and modifiers. The *mischief* of the title, incorporated into both sentences, seems to be considerably more than that. The final descriptive tagline reinforces that concept.

• Exclamations are meant to startle

Exclamations

Exclamations pull the attention up abruptly and say to the reader "How about that!" They are a useful device, which, like all devices, should not be overused. But for fiction with sharp contrasts or unexpected twists, an exclamation can often be more effective than a description or an explanation.

The Forty Fathom Bank: Novella
by Les Galloway

Annotation: The author recalls the year 1940 in San Francisco when, worried about how he would support his family, he settled on a get-rich-quick scheme involving shark fishing. But life at sea proved difficult, especially when he was called on to cope with rough waters, a silent partner, a dead engine, and—most dangerous of all—an overactive imagination!

Comment: Things were bad enough already, and oh, what imagination can do to you! The exclamation point emphasizes the possibilities.

• Quotes offer flavor and precision

Quotes

Sometimes a few words **from** the text can convey a book's approach or flavor much more directly than words **about** the text. Selected phrases or a line or two of poetry can illustrate method and feeling. Quotes are often necessary for nonfiction works where the author identifies his approach or thesis with a particular repeated phrase.

Note that in using quotes an ellipsis is not needed at the beginning or at the end; the reader knows that only part of the material in the book is being quoted. An ellipsis is used only when words are omitted from within the phrase being quoted.

Example: And in the title poem, an autobiographical narrative, he speaks of learning "the need in all things…to balance out."

Using a few words, phrases, or lines of poetry does not infringe on copyright, a problem that always lurks in the minds of librarians and conscientious writers. Quotes used for reviews or commentary are allowable under copyright law. And it would usually be difficult in a fifty-word annotation to lift enough material to usurp the writer's theme, much less gain any advantage from it, especially when quotes indicate the author as source. An exception occurs in very short material, such as a poem for children, where the annotator must be careful not to use the entire piece.

Sentence: Many are known by familiar first lines, including "Will the day be bright and cloudy?" (*The Complete Poems* by Emily Brontë)

Sentence: She explores the progression [of her father's final illness], beginning with a visit and observing how her father "sat as if waiting for his daughter." (*The Father* by Sharon Olds)

Sentence: He divides his extended meditation into eighteen sections, each division "a catch-your-breath moment" before his argument continues. (*Garbage* by A.R. Ammons)

Comment: All three of these quotes are used in annotations for poetry, which often seems to cry out for some small sound of the author's own voice.

Acts of Faith: Daily Meditations for People of Color
by Iyanla Vanzant

Sentence: Daily meditative statements that Vanzant hopes will "assist the children of the earth in the redevelopment of their minds, bodies, and spirits."

Comment: The statement of such an extensive purpose is more effective in the author's words than in a writer's summation.

Quote from the book, not about it

Quotes from introductions, book reviews, and other source materials are a different matter entirely. Without other information, the reader will assume that the words quoted are the author's. It is unnecessary to use quotes if a phrase describing the book comes naturally to the subject matter; one person's historical fiction is likely to be everyone's historical fiction, and using such general descriptive phrases does not constitute appropriating someone else's work.

Quotes from introductions by well-known people should be attributed, which has the additional benefit of indicating that the introduction exists as part of the book. Rarely, an authority in the field may be quoted; the quote should be attributed and the credentials noted briefly. Generally, however, it is better to describe the book than to tell what someone else, however prominent, thinks about it.

Be specific and concise

Be specific and concise

Language should create a precise image. Sentences should flow smoothly from one thought to another and should not encompass too many separate thoughts. Avoid overusing prepositional phrases, choppy sentences with too many discrete parts, and wordiness.

Avoid imprecise language

Annotation: Excerpts from various sources that present the author's provocative opinions and

insights on literature, feminism, her family, and various contemporary figures.

Comment: Two vague, *various* things are too many. If it is important to mention sources at all, they need more definition. The second various is unnecessary and weakens an otherwise good listing of content; readers would no more expect opinions on all contemporary figures than they would on all literature. Much of the time *various* can be left out with no meaning lost.

• ***Avoid fuzzy words***

• ***Limit prepositional phrases***

Don't use too many prepositional phrases

At one time, NLS stressed starting annotations with the traditional five **w**'s (who, what, when, where, and why) and an **h** (how) of newspaper reporters. The result was frequently a conglomerate that bumped along in a sing-song manner from one prepositional phrase to another. These are important considerations for notes and for inclusion somewhere in the annotation (*see* Jot down notes, p. 44). But not all in the first sentence.

First sentence: Novel about one year in the lives of four women in their late thirties in the glamorous city of New York…

Comment: Three *in*s and two *of*s, one after the other. And the sentence goes on from there. In annotations, *novel about* is a weak opening.

First sentence: Former *Washington Post* White House correspondent chronicles the paper's centennial (1) from its founding (2) by Democrat Stilson Hutchins (3) from New Hampshire (4) in 1877 (5) to the exciting days (6) of the Watergate expose.

First sentence: Novel examines the lives (1) of Beverly and her friends, two wealthy sisters (2) from a prominent family, (3) from young womanhood (4) in the mid-1940s (5) in California (6) through the turbulent present.

Comment: There are six prepositional phrases in each sentence. Consider whether all this information

needs to be included. See if another construction can be used.

Some wordiness can be avoided by substituting adjectives for prepositional phrases:

- Australian kangaroo species, **not** species of kangaroo in Australia
- New Orleans street, **not** street in New Orleans
- social evils, **not** evils of society.

This technique can become as monotonous as the prepositional phrases and should not be used all the time, but it does make writing more concise. A judicious mixture of prepositions and adjectives is the best solution.

• Language should flow, not bump along

Smooth out choppy sentences

A sentence needs to flow easily from one thought to the next with a construction that is easy to follow. If a sentence breaks too frequently, it loses focus and may become devoid of meaning.

First sentence: In Florida, in 1941, irrepressible, red-haired, six-year-old Terrell, son of Gerald, the harried manager of a farmworker's camp, and his expectant wife, Mickey, continually plays hooky from school.

Comment: Too many thought units broken up by too many commas. Some of the information may be unnecessary; some could be combined (*Florida farmworker's camp*). The subject of the sentence (*Terrell*) takes a while to appear and is a long way from the verb (*plays hooky*). Readers should not have to work to determine who and what the book is about.

- ***Words should convey meaning—succinctly***

Eliminate wordiness

Wordiness takes many forms. The examples given for overuse of prepositional phrases and choppy sentences show types of wordiness that results from sentences with too much detail. An opposite phenomenon can also occur.

> *Annotation:* The authors trace one hundred years of American technology from the innovative plumbers of the 1770s to the inventions of Bell and Edison. Through the use of minibiographies, they produce a highly readable study of the early years of American technology.
>
> *Comment:* Too many words for the amount of information they provide. The facts presented are (1) 100 years of technology, (2) from the 1770s to Bell and Edison, (3) through the use of minibiographies. *A highly readable* study is opinion. The annotation is circular; it starts with American technology and ends with American technology. Space and words could be used to better advantage. Do the authors have a point to make? And who are Bell and Edison?

The simplest and most obvious form of wordiness consists of using words and phrases that could be eliminated or made more specific without changing the meaning or the impact.

Wordy: one of the most distinguished of the Latin fathers

Concise: a distinguished churchman

Wordy: shortcuts and guidelines, including specific details

Concise: tips

Wordy: Considered to be the most famous biography in the English language, this is an intimate …

Concise: Famous biography gives an intimate …

Wordy: information in the area of …

Concise: information about/on

Avoid repetition

• ***Synonyms help***

One of the most common problems in annotation writing is repeating the same word several times, when a different word would surely add more interest and provide more information. Sometimes a different construction is needed.

Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor
by Susan Haskins

Annotation: Scriptural exegesis, history, and art serve as sources for this portrait of the renowned female saint and intimate of Jesus. Haskins demonstrates how through the ages the *image* (1) of Mary Magdalen has merged with other biblical figures to become that of the penitent prostitute, a *portrayal* (2) that epitomizes the subordinate role of women in the church and in society. Haskins reevaluates that *concept* (3).

Comment: Good annotation on a complex subject, improved by finding two new and more explicit words. *Image*, (1) indicating something that exists in the mind, was originally used in all three places marked. Substituting other nouns not only avoids the monotony of repetition but enlarges on the thrust of the book. *Portrayal* (2) in the next clause adds the element of creation; someone or something made the image what it has become. *Concept* (3) refers back to the role of women and, as a last word, gives emphasis to the author's thesis.

Dreams of Dead Women's Handbags: Collected Stories
by Shena Mackay

Sentence: Thirty-one short stories *written* since 1974 by this British fiction *writer* who often *writes*

of bizarre circumstances in the seemingly normal lives of her characters.

Comment: Written, writer, writes—all forms of the same word. Obviously what a writer does is write. This kind of repetition is easily corrected by making the fiction writer an *author* and replacing writes with *tells*. With these simple changes, this fine introductory sentence refers back to the rather cryptic title with *bizarre circumstances* juxtaposed to *seemingly normal*.

• Simple rules aid comprehension

There is no need to study all the parts of speech and become conversant with such esoterica as gerundives and cognate objects. Following a few basic tenets will make the annotation easy to follow, which is what annotation writing is all about. There are many good books on grammar for further reference. Just remember that if the construction misleads, gramatically correct or not, do something else.

Subjects and verbs should agree

Subjects and verbs. Subjects and verbs should agree: they are either singular or plural but not one of each. Lack of agreement most often occurs with collective nouns (a *family does* something, but *its members do* something) or with compound subjects separated by descriptive clauses or phrases. Lack of agreement often creeps in when the subject and verb are separated by long, parenthetical information. Keep the construction simple and the verb reasonably close to the subject.

Sentence: Recollections of the four Carter children growing up, and their relationship with each other, provides insight into the mercurial personality of Billy.

Problem: Recollections is plural; *provides* is singular. Thirteen words come between the subject and the verb and contribute to the creation of an error.

Pronouns should have clear antecedents

Referents should be clear. Watch those pronouns and modifiers.

Annotation: When a stranger offers young Willie Banks a ride and asks him to deliver a package, he is unaware that he is about to become …

Problem: Which *he*? Willie or the stranger? Both? Separately? There are four possible readings.

Annotation: Joining two friends for a flight from San Francisco to Death Valley, the pilot chooses the wrong pass, forcing the plane into the mountainside and killing the author's two friends.

Problem: If all three people are friends, the sentence is correct technically; the pilot joined two friends and the author's two friends were killed. But the pilot and the author are two different people; the pilot did not survive. That's almost impossible to determine from the information in the sentence.

Watch out for danglers. Participles and phrases should not be grammatically on their own; they should have something to modify—the noun or pronoun that comes next.

Phrases should be properly attached

Annotation: **Written in 1962,** the former president…

Problem: The former president wasn't written in 1962, the book was.

Annotation: **The recipient of many awards including the Pulitzer Prize,** her poems …

Problem: The dangling modifier fails to make a subtle distinction; the poem doesn't receive the prize, the poet does.

Annotation: As soon as Jessica arrives, someone tries to steal her suitcase, and **while visiting Salisbury Cathedral**, the same person attacks her…

Problem: Grammatically the reference is to *the same person*, who is also the *someone* in the previ-

ous clause. The person meant is Jessica, and the sentence is easily fixed by inserting *she is* before *visiting*. Dangling modifiers generally appear at the beginning of a sentence, but obviously they can also be hidden within one.

Be careful with punctuation

• Small marks group thoughts

Use proper and adequate punctuation. These small marks help to group thoughts that belong together and separate those that need to be isolated. Collecting and separating thought units help the person who reads the written annotation and the narrator who presents the oral one.

Don't let words and thoughts run together; use more punctuation rather than less when there is a chance of misreading. Divide long sentences into separate thought segments with commas, semicolons, dashes, and colons and even into discrete sentences with periods. Use dashes or parentheses to isolate elements when too many commas become confusing. Ease of reading is the criterion.

The following comments on punctuation marks cover the most common usages. The discussion is in no way complete; possibilities are seemingly endless. As with grammar, many good reference books are available for difficult punctuation situations.

Some punctuation marks are generally understood and need little comment. The smallest of all, the period, is used to indicate a full stop. The uses of question and exclamation marks are defined by their names, and apostrophes are used to indicate possession or letters omitted in contractions.

Some punctuation marks that have several uses or can be easily misused need clarification.

, , , , ,

Commas. Some punctuation is optional. *The Chicago Manual of Style* manual says that, aside from the few obligatory situations, use of the comma is mainly a matter of

good judgment, with ease of reading as the end in view (section 5.29). That statement doesn't mean commas can be used at random; it recommends judgment.

One of the obligatory uses is between two or more parts of a compound sentence. The discrete sections should be set apart for ease of reading, except when each part is very short.

Another required use is for nonrestrictive clauses, which add information; unlike restrictive clauses that are needed to define. Information that is merely added is set apart; information that is needed is not set off by a comma.

> *Restrictive:* He is the one person **who can help you.**
> *Comment:* Information needed; no comma. This person is the only one.

> *Nonrestrictive:* All of these people, **who come from different parts of the country,** are going on the cruise together.
> *Comment:* Merely adds information, set off by commas. The main idea of the sentence would be complete without the clause.

Chicago style also uses the serial comma: all items in a series of three or more are separated by commas, including a comma before *and* or *or* preceding the last item in the series.

Note that a comma should never separate the subject of a sentence from its verb(s). There can be commas before the verb, as in sentences with descriptive information in apposition to the subject, but the commas must not simply separate. This situation generally occurs when too much information comes between the subject and the verb, or sometimes when there are two verbs, and the construction becomes elusive.

The Cat Who Tailed a Thief
by Lilian Jackson Braun

Annotation: A rash of petty thievery, newcomers in Pickax, a wedding, and a couple of murders Down Below, keep Qwilleran, who has bought a condo for the winter, and his cats, Koko and Yum Yum, busy during the holiday season. Bestseller.

Problem: It's that hard-to-spot comma after *Below.* The sentence has a compound subject in four parts, and the serial commas are used correctly between the parts, but the comma after the last one disconnects all four from their verb.

; ; ; ; ;

Semicolons. One common use of the semicolon is to separate elements in a series (including a series of coordinate clauses) where some items have interior commas. Another major purpose is to separate parts of a compound sentence where the connective conjunction is not used; this usage can also be considered a joining of two related sentences whose connection would be less clear if each came to a full stop. It can also be used before connective words that emphasize a transition and a relationship such as *therefore, however, moreover, also,* and *consequently*. These words are usually followed by a comma for more emphasis.

100 Years, 100 Stories
by George Burns

Sentence: Burns states that he can't put each of his fans in his will; he can't even thank them enough.

Comment: The second part of the sentence completes the first, with the semicolon creating a pause but not a full stop.

Le Cordon Bleu Classic French Cookbook
edited by Julia Alcock

Annotation: One hundred classic recipes to celebrate the cooking school's centenary. **Includes first courses, such as vichyssoise; main courses, such as**

duck breasts with pistachios; and desserts, such as chocolate and Cointreau gateau. A section on techniques provides the beginner with the basics for becoming a successful cook. 1994.

Comment: Semicolons separate sections of the sentence with interior commas. The sentence is also a fine example of parallel structure.

Colons. The colon is generally used to indicate that what follows will explain or complete the preceding thought.

Uncommon Knowledge
by Judy Lewis

Sentence: Growing up as Loretta Young's adopted daughter, Judy finally learns her true identity when her fiancé tells her what the rest of her world has known: **she is Young's illegitimate daughter by Clark Gable.**

Comment: Note the colon after *known.* This mark indicates that the rest of the sentence will tell what the generally known thing is, and so it does.

Dashes. Be careful about dashes. Even though they are large and visible, they function as a kind of subsidiary comma, setting aside things where commas are already in use. They can also be used to indicate a longer pause than that created by a comma, for situations where the information that follows comes as somewhat of a change or surprise. A dash should not be a substitute for a colon when the information that follows explains or completes the preceding thought.

Sentence: Meanwhile, when John Porteous—**a guard condemned for murder**—is reprieved by the queen, a mob takes justice into its own hands.

Comment: The parenthetical description would normally be set off by commas. However, the sentence has two commas needed for other purposes, so the dashes are used to isolate the information.

Sentence: She travels to Harpers Ferry where her arrival, along with that of her grandfather, Daniel Griffin, stirs up long-suppressed memories involving murder—**and another murder ensues.**

Comment: After the rather involved part of the sentence that evokes the past, a pause is needed to introduce the brisk announcement of current mayhem.

( ) ( ) ( )

Parentheses. These paired markings are perfectly acceptable punctuation for setting aside some types of information, and there is no reason to eliminate them from your repertoire. Their purpose is to set off information not necessary to the grammatical construction of the sentence but too important to omit.

Like dashes, which can often be used in similar constructions, parentheses should be used with care and should not appear to enclose an afterthought that should have been incorporated earlier.

That Kind of Danger RC 39979
by Donna Masini

Annotation: Unlikely urban places, including construction sites and a dark basement, form the settings of these poems. But the noise ("sandblast, jackhammer, the city making itself over") and violence ("a leather jacket, handgun followed me up the stairs") that permeate life in the city are relieved by sweetness ("I laugh—at nothing—the way a baby laughs at wallpaper"). Some strong language.

Comment: Parentheses bring examples of the poet's words close to the nouns describing them as instant illustrations of the concept. It is seldom necessary to use parentheses in this kind of situation, but they provide one possible alternative for conveying the information.

Parentheses are particularly useful for dates and references to other material that would take several more words to insert in the sentence as a phrase or part of a clause. NLS also uses them as its style for book numbers in referring to other works by the same author or in a series. (Note that we never give a reference without a book number; the cross reference is useless to the patron unless it provides a means of ordering the book.)

Sentence: The complete texts of *The Hard Hours* (1967), which won the Pulitzer Prize; *Millions of Strange Shadows* (1977); and *The Venetian Vespers* (1979); along with selections from *A Summoning of Stones* (1954), Hecht's first poetry collection.

Sentence: The author of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (RC 24959)* and the poem read at President Clinton's inauguration, *On the Pulse of the Morning (RC 36169)*, presents four poems that celebrate women: Phenomenal Woman, Still I Rise, Weekend Glory, and Our Grandmothers.

Adhere to style

Style is for consistency

Style in this context means the treatment of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and numbers that have various acceptable forms. For consistency, one form is selected and used throughout. As noted in earlier sections NLS uses *The Chicago Manual of Style* as the basic reference. It has also adopted some style practices of its own that have been found to be more workable for annotations. (*See* Style and Presentation, p. 131.)

Other annotation writers do not, of course, have to follow these forms. But every individual or group should use some formal style reference or develop practices that are adhered to consistently. Otherwise, there is chaos.

The style chosen will often differ from the style used in the book being annotated; publishers have, or should have, their own style practices. This problem occurs most often

with capitalization: But it's capitalized in the book! It doesn't matter what the book does; if you have a style, you should adhere to it. Otherwise, you are at the mercy of a different style for every publisher, or possibly for every book.

Editing an annotation

Why edit?

Editing reverses the writing process: the writer goes from the book to the annotation; the editor goes from the annotation to the book. The editor can look at the announcement as the reader would—without necessarily any prior knowledge of the book—and consider what it tells. Editors are looking for exactly the same things writers should have been concerned with; they simply start in a different place.

Editors stand in for the reader

Editing does not automatically mean making changes; the review may show that the copy can stand as written. Or it may show quite the opposite: that a complete rewrite is needed. Most annotations will fall somewhere in between, with some changes needed. From an editing point of view, annotations come in four categories:

- no editing or minimal changes needed
- some editing needed to correct grammar or construction
- multiple errors that require revision
- serious content problems that may require rethinking and rewriting.

Editors should have available the source material, and sometimes the book itself, so that content can be verified.

Think first

Put down the pencil! Like writers, editors have to take time to think. All editing begins with questioning: Are these the right words for the purpose? Read the announcement as a whole: bibliographic information, description, and additional information. Then consider the following questions about the annotation:

Six questions to deal with

- Is it stylistically correct?
- Is it grammatical?
- Is it interesting?
- Is it judgmental?
- Does it describe the book?
- Are the facts accurate?

These questions are arranged, not in order of importance, but according to usual editorial procedure. Errors in style and grammar hit the eye first; determining accuracy of content requires research. A simple language change can disclose other problems. All questions must be handled, but they cannot always be dealt with in the order given.

Is the annotation stylistically correct?

Fix errors in style

The most common mistakes will be corrected easily and, since they are common, almost automatically by the editor. For less frequent and more complicated situations, the editor should have two references readily available, *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition.* If a more complete dictionary is needed to locate a word, that word is probably too obscure to present to readers, who should not have to interrupt their selection process to consult a dictionary.

Most groups will develop their own style lists and practices. Those for NLS consist largely of frequently used but scattered sections of the basic style manual, plus some deviations from that style, and a few situations not covered. (*See* Part Two: Style and Presentation, p. 131.)

Is the annotation grammatical?

Subject and verb agreement

Grammatical mistakes may be simple to correct: locate the subject and the verb and bring them into agreement. Sentences may require some rearranging or rewriting if the subject and verb are too far apart and difficult to locate, even if they do agree.

Sentence: Auntie Tiger Lil, followed by her niece Lily in a large cylindrical costume, hotly **pursue** the thief.

Problem: Although two people are in this chase, the subject of the sentence, *Auntie Tiger Lil,* is singular; information about the niece is parenthetical. The verb should be *pursues*.

Check that subjects and verb go together

Sentence: Lonsdale College of Oxford will soon be seeking a new master, and there **appears** to be only **two main contenders**—Storrs and Cornford.

Problem: In this case, the subject is not *there* but the people listed after the verb, and there are two of them. The verb should be *appear*.

Sentence: Lively **stories** of the names of some of the most familiar stars, planets, and constellations **include** what ancient people believed about them and what scientists know today.

Problem: All those words between the subject and the verb (which do agree), including three *of* phrases.

Procedure: Divide into two sentences, give the first its own verb, and delete the wordiness. Also delete the judgmental adjective *lively.*

Edited: Stories explain the names of familiar stars, planets, and constellations. Covers…

Misplaced modifiers

Misplaced modifiers are so far from the words they describe that readers cannot be sure which words are meant. The meaning must be clarified. These phrases usually have to be moved to their correct location and the sentence repunctuated, rewritten, or divided.

Watch location of modifiers

Sentence: Like the saint, Margarita becomes a familiar figure in the Bay area **serving the outcasts.**

Problem: Serving the outcasts should modify *figure*. Note that it could also modify *area*, but that would give a different, and unintended, meaning to the sentence.

Procedure: Move the phrase to follow *figure.*

Dangling participles

Dangling participles are often coupled with other language or content problems. They always require rewriting to clarify.

Example: Meeting in 1946 (1) when Ivinskaya was a beautiful young editor (2), this is an account of (3) their love for each other. (The unidentified half of *their* is Russian author Boris Pasternak.)

Attach dangling phrases

Problems: (1) The phrase is dangling rather than misplaced because it doesn't modify any of the subsequent words. It also doesn't indicate the duration of their relationship, which has a bearing on her credentials for writing this book. (2) This description can cover a twenty-year span. She was in her mid-thirties—hardly elderly, but the meaning of *beautiful, young* would surely be different for a gothic novel. (3) Wordy within the annotation as well as at the beginning.

Procedure: Could be made grammatical by replacing *meeting* with *Ivinskaya and Pasternak met* and dividing into two sentences. That correction would not solve the content problems. Needs research and rewriting.

Rewritten: This love story covers the last fourteen years of Pasternak's life, which Ivinskaya shared, and …

Ambiguous pronouns

Correcting other grammatical mistakes may also take research. Ambiguous pronouns require discovering which person is meant. Reviews or the book jacket may clarify the reference; some reading may be necessary.

Example: Traces the lives of frontiersman Matthew Howard, a follower of Jefferson and **his** aristocratic wife.

Pronouns should clearly show who—or what—is meant

Problem: Grammatically, the wife referred to must be Jefferson's, because his name is the nearest reference to the pronoun. But *lives* is plural and must refer to Howard and his wife, as there is no other person indicated.

Procedure: An easy one. Insert a comma after Jefferson to make the phrase parenthetical; Mrs. Howard is the wife being discussed. Or rearrange, if the relationships still seem obscure.

Parallel structure

Lack of parallel structure can also obscure meaning, especially if one section contains a vague phrase. Finding more precise language may require more knowledge of the book.

Example: Relates the story of Sir John Ollenshaw's crippled son, Philip, who **grew up** in hatred and neglect, **left** England for America, and **what he accomplished there.**

Present like thoughts in the same way

Problems: The final phrase needs a verb form parallel with *grew up* and *left.* What did he accomplish? Also, some wordiness could be eliminated and the tense made more immediate.

Procedure: Check the sources for a specific accomplishment.

Rewritten: Sir John Ollenshaw's crippled son, Philip, grows up in hatred and neglect, leaves England for America, and learns to survive in the wilderness.

No Time to Say Goodbye:
Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One
by Carla Fine

Annotation: Seven years before writing this book, the author learned that her forty-four-year-old husband had killed himself. **She writes of her experiences in dealing with this, and discusses the stories of the people she met in survivor groups and the comments of experts.** Included are lists of related organizations, resources, and support groups. Some violence. 1997.

Problems: The major problem in the middle sentence is lack of parallel structure; there are three elements (*experiences, stories,* and *comments*) but only two verbs (*writes of* and *discusses*), with the second verb trying to cover two of the three. In addition, there is some weak writing: the repetition of *write* from the first sentence, a vague *this* referring back to the entire first sentence, and unnecessary use of the definite article *the*. Also the next sentence is written in the passive voice.

Edited: She *relates* her experiences in dealing with her *anguish, discusses* stories of people she met in survivor groups, and *provides* comments of experts. *Includes…*

Is the annotation interesting?

A good annotation won't get people to select books on subjects they don't care about, but a dull or vague annotation might cause them to ignore books they would enjoy or find useful. Editors need to consider:

Four questions to deal with

- Does the annotation contain information that achieves the purpose?
- Does it leave something to the reader by not giving away too much of the plot?
- Is it concise and easy to follow?
- Does it use clear and descriptive language?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, the editor will have to study the annotation to isolate its problems. Editors must consider the facts chosen for inclusion, the structure and balance of their presentation, and the language used to express them. Editors may have to separate these interwoven factors. They may have to rearrange language, add or substitute more precise and descriptive words, and eliminate wordiness. They may also have to add some facts for balance and delete some for conciseness.

Are appropriate facts chosen?

Consider the facts

The annotation should cover the basic content of the book and the direction the author is taking. Focusing too much on how things begin, for either fiction or nonfiction, detracts from what is covered or where the theme is leading.

Marina and Lee
by Priscilla Johnson McMillan

Annotation: (1) A former member of Sen. John F. Kennedy's staff, later a Moscow-based reporter who interviewed Lee Harvey Oswald, (2) tells the intimate details of his marriage to a Russian and his personal life. (3) A sympathetic portrait (4) of this unlikely couple's life together in Russia and America and (5) a discussion of Oswald's motive for assassinating Kennedy. 1977.

Problems: (1) The book-jacket information about the author and several reviews of the book confirm

her connections to Kennedy and Oswald; they probably explain the author's interest in the subject. The reader would probably conclude that the material came from these sources. Actually, most of it came from research and from Mrs. Oswald, who is not mentioned as a source. Also, the background of the author has a more prominent position in the annotation than the subject of the book. (2) Wrong order; his personal life should come first and then his marriage, which was eventually a part of it. (3) This statement should come first to introduce what the book is about. *Sympathetic* is an acceptable modifier in this context; it goes to the attitude of the author. (4) *Unlikely* is a judgmental word without some defining content. (5) This statement could be more precise and intriguing; does the author have an opinion to offer?

Rewritten: Sympathetic portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald's personal life and intimate details of his marriage. Written with his Russian-born widow's cooperation, this study depicts the couple's life together in Russia and America and theorizes that Oswald's motives for assassinating Kennedy were both political and personal.

Does the annotation leave something for the reader?

Watch out for too much information

Telling too much of the plot can destroy interest. Seeming to give away the whole story is as deadly as actually doing it.

All the Rivers Run
by Nancy Cato

Annotation: Orphaned in a shipwreck and cut off from her native England, twelve-year-old Delie begins a new life in the gold-mining town of Kiandra in Australia. Raised by relatives in the outback country, she becomes a lovely young woman, leaves home to study art, and marries a riverboat captain.

Comment: The first sentence sets the scene well, except for excess prepositions at the end. The second sentence gives a rather flat outline of the plot, with the implication that the heroine married and they lived happily ever after. There is little to entice the reader's imagination. Actually, much of the action takes place after the marriage; there was no proverbial happy ending at that point. Some small editorial changes could remove the wrong impression and throw the focus more on the setting, where it belongs for this novel. Discovering what happens in the heroine's life would depend on reading the book—the reader's choice.

Rewritten: Orphaned in a shipwreck and shut off from her native England, twelve-year-old Delie begins a new life in Kiandra, an Australian gold-mining town. The saga of her life is set in the outback country where she is raised, in the cities where she studies art, and on the riverboat where she raises her own family.

Is it concise and easy to follow?

Check for clarity

Facts selected need to move the reader easily from the opening premise or situation through to an ending that supports the premise or leads onward into the plot. When the sentences are overstuffed or meander through a variety of unconnected facts, the reader is put to too much work sorting things out and can easily lose interest.

Example: With the mistakenly convicted young murderer of his wife Nina about to be executed, Steve's asthmatic six-year-old son who witnessed his mother's murder is kidnapped—possibly by the real murderer.

Comment: Some commas would help. The sentence ends well, but there is too much information preceding the final phrase. The wife's name adds little, and too many facts about the son are stuffed in. If the person was convicted erroneously, he's not

a murderer; all those words include one that's wrong. Such mistakes are easier to make when too much information is being handled as a unit.

Edited: As the young man mistakenly convicted of murdering Steve's wife is about to be executed, Steve's asthmatic six-year-old son is kidnapped—possibly by the real murderer.

Is the language clear and descriptive?

Words, words, words

Many problems are caused by choice of words: misused words, unnecessary words, too few words, words that could be better selected, words that would be better placed, words that should never be used.

Misused words

Sentence: Account of the author's **bout** with rheumatoid arthritis from the age of twenty-five, and her determination not to be thought of, and treated as, a cripple.

Comment: Bout is generally used for a short-term, one-time conflict. It's inappropriate for the description of a lifelong struggle. Note that using *cripple* is appropriate here; the negative connotation is what she was trying to avoid.

Words used incorrectly

Sentence: **Personalized** overview of Tito's swiftly changing land by a former Yugoslav….

Comment: Personalized means made for someone, such as stationery or T-shirts. The point of view was taken by someone and was from a *personal* perspective.

Sentence: Born **illegitimately,** Brown was adopted by relatives and raised in the south.

Comment: Illegitimacy is not something active that can be encompassed in an adverb; it is a legal or societal concept described by an adjective. Use *Born illegitimate,* or rewrite.

Rewritten: Describes her illegitimate birth, adoption by relatives, and southern childhood.

Sentence: Although the Aborigine is **suppose** to complete his walkabout alone…

Comment: To *suppose* is to speculate or assume. The word for being required to is *supposed.*

Sentence: A **most unique** presentation…

Comment: Unique means singular, without equal. A one-of-a-kind thing cannot be more or less so. Unique cannot be compared; delete *most*.

Annotation: The **mythology** of cleanliness moving up next to godliness is the prime **tenet** *of [the author's]* **thesis**, and he **debunks** it well.

Comment: Thesis is an argument presented and a *tenet* can be part of that; but *debunks* means to expose sham pretensions. The words are contradictory and at least one is misused. The editor has to determine whether **cleanliness** is a tenet or a target. The presence of *mythology*, even though incorrectly used, suggests that the intent is to explode the myth. Note that the last clause passes judgment on the author's success with handling the subject.

Procedure: Definitely rewrite.

Unnecessary words. The annotation should be kept tight, for both space considerations and ease of reading. Often wordiness creeps in when the writer has difficulty getting to the point—or perhaps getting the point.

Words just filling space

Example: **There is** a final section **that also** discusses his conclusions.

Procedure: Edit to "The final section discusses his conclusions." Eliminate the statement entirely if there is already enough information. Better still, substitute a sentence summarizing the conclusions. To identify the conclusions is much more meaningful than to tell where they are placed in the book.

Examples:

- The adventures of…who …
- A collection of…that …

Procedure: Such phrases should be eliminated and the subject approached directly. The information needed is the content indicated by the ellipses.

Too few words. Often an annotation that is seemingly correct is also bland and fails to indicate the approach of the writer or the tone of the book. A few well-chosen descriptive words or phrases can make a big difference.

Words needed

How to Travel with a Salmon and Other Essays
by Umberto Eco

Annotation: In this collection (1) of forty-one essays (1), Eco (1) reflects (2) on the follies of modern life. His topics include telegrams, fax machines and cellular phones, private and public libraries, and sequels. One lengthy essay (3) entitled "Stars and Stripes" is a science fiction tale (3) of intergalactic sex and espionage. Some violence and some descriptions of sex.

Comment: (1) Readers know from the bibliographic statements that this book is a collection of essays by Mr. Eco; the only new information in the first part of the sentence is the number of entries. (2) *Reflects* how? We need an adjective to indicate the approach. (3) In spite of the book's title, a science fiction tale is not an essay.

Edited: Forty-one pieces give the Italian author's curmudgeonly reflections on the follies of modern life. His topics include telegrams, fax machines and cellular phones, private and public libraries, and sequels. One lengthy parody entitled "Stars and Stripes" is a science fiction tale of intergalactic sex and espionage. Some violence and some descriptions of sex.

Sloppy choices

Words that could be better selected. Many aspects of language could be considered under this heading. In general, the editor should see if the wording can be tightened, if synonyms are needed to avoid repetition, if additions would add definition or interest, or if substitutions are needed.

Tightening: shows how false the common view is
Edited: shows common misconceptions

Adding definition: sending towns backward and forward in time
Edited: sending towns backward into prehistoric settlements and forward into futuristic cities

Adding interest: In London William Helder meets the beautiful Hazel Paget
Edited: A rich London bachelor meets an attractive Cambridgeshire secretary (descriptions indicate more about the plot than names)

Substituting to expand information:

Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution
by Jack N. Rakove
Annotation: Explores the ideological and political assumptions that underlie the **original meanings** of the Constitution. Critiques the method of **originalism,** which looks to **original meaning** for adapting the document in modern circumstances. Examines specific issues, such as federalism.
Comment: Using some form of the title three more times in the annotation does not enlarge on the concept, and it kills interest. Some explanatory phrases need to be substituted and more information incorporated.

Edited: Explores the ideological and political assumptions that underlie the original meanings of the Constitution and the resulting ambiguities. Critiques the method that looks solely to the founders' intent for adapting the document to modern circumstances. Examines specific issues, such as federalism and the influence of James Madison.

Words that could be better placed. Positioning makes a difference in readability and often in thrust.

The Book of Sand
by Jorge Luis Borges

Wrong placement

Annotation: An assortment of thirteen short stories from the distinguished blind Argentinean poet **that contains fable, philosophy, and autobiography.**

Comment: The poet doesn't contain these things; the clause really modifies *assortment,* which is two prepositional phrases back in the sentence. Even without the grammatical problem, starting with these content words provides more interest.

Edited: Fable, philosophy, and autobiography in thirteen short stories from the distinguished blind Argentinean poet.

Words that should not be used. Inappropriate words include those that violate sensitivities and those that appear to judge the author. Many others are hard to classify but, like a Supreme Court justice's comment on pornography, you know it when you see it. Editors need to be alert.

Misleading words

Example: Tells of the hopes and understanding needed for dealing with a **hopelessly** retarded child.

Comment: The book explains that the parents haven't given up hope. Putting *hopes* and *hopelessly* in the same sentence needlessly emphasizes the difficulty. In addition, *hopelessly* is judgmental about the condition.

Edited: …severely retarded child (or, a child with severe mental retardation).

Example: The author **attempts to** explain
Comment: Attempts to implies a lack of success, a judgment better left to the reader.
Edited: The author explains/theorizes/claims/shows/proposes …

Example: The author **believes** travel stories should be oriented to the actual act of traveling, rather than to the destination to which one goes.
Comment: There's no way to know what an author believes; we can only know what is said.
Edited: The author argues that travel stories should be oriented to the actual act of traveling, rather than to the destination.

Example: The **narrator,** a ten-year-old child, discloses…
Comment: Narrator is frequently used to identify the point of view of a novel written in the first person. However, the word has a specific meaning for NLS patrons: the person who is reading the book for the recorded version, who is also called a reader. To avoid confusion, the word should not be used in its usual sense. In this case, the annotation can simply begin with *A ten-year-old child.*

Sexual innuendo

Freudian traps. Also look at whether the annotation has any hidden Freudian traps—situations where the writer intended one reading and the reader may find quite another. Grammatical errors can often lead to amusing interpretations, but none get quite as much reaction as those with sexual connotations, even mild ones. The annotation should not become, unintentionally, too interesting. These statements often provoke the proverbial double-take: *What did that say?*

Every Other Man
by Mary Ann Bartusis

Consider: Explores some of the deep-seated emotional conditions that cause men to be unfaithful and **gives specific details on handling many aspects of extramarital affairs.**

Reconsider: Is the book a how-to manual for philandering husbands? The statement should be directed to its proper audience.

Edited: …and gives women techniques for coping with many aspects of their husbands' extramarital affairs.

All Things Wise and Wonderful
by James Herriot

Consider: Yorkshire veterinarian recalls his stint in the RAF during World War II and expresses his feelings about his new family and friends, including **his first child whom his wife delivered….**

Reconsider: Veterinarian or not, it's unlikely that he had the child and she did the delivery. The writer was thinking about his not being there when the baby was born, but the sentence doesn't read that way.

Procedure: The easiest solution is to delete everything after *child.* Alternatively, the editor could insert *the birth of* before *his first child.* Either way, the phrase about the delivery should go, and *family* and *friends* should be reversed.

Lust for Life: The Novel of Vincent van Gogh
by Irving Stone

Consider: Fictionalized account of the Dutch painter follows his tortured life of unsuccessful love affairs **and endless striving for perfect techniques and accomplishment.** Some explicit descriptions of sex.

Reconsider: The writer had in mind artistic technique and accomplishment, which is only one part of

the book. The title and the placement of the phrase might easily indicate that the subject is still sex, especially when followed by the tagline about *explicit descriptions.*

Procedure: Divide into two sentences and make sure that his love life and his artistic endeavors are clearly delineated.

Is the annotation judgmental?

Most judgments occur in adjectives describing the book: *exciting, poignant, easily read and interesting.* Some judgments are even more overt: *a joyful collection, a useful and entertaining work, a highly readable book, an essay of wide-ranging importance.* Editors must eliminate words and phrases that tell readers what they will think about a book. These judgments almost leap to the eye, and editors will eliminate them easily.

The Library of Congress has no opinion

Other judgments are more subtle and require consideration of the impact of words that judge the action described rather than the approach of the book.

Example: At fifty-one, the author **finally** comes to terms with his homosexuality.

Comment: That *finally* implies that he should have done it sooner. Unless a long struggle is identified earlier in the annotation, the word is judgmental and should be eliminated. The age listed conveys duration, and the more succinct sentence has more impact.

Endorsement of books or authors

More serious are characterizations of authors or style of writing that state directly or imply that the Library of Congress endorses some books or authors.

The Library does not promote authors

A Fine and Pleasant Misery
by Patrick F. McManus

Annotation: Twenty-seven (1) mirth-provoking, (2) cautionary camping reminiscences that originally appeared in *Field and Stream.* Considered by critics as (3) one of the funniest contemporary humorists, McManus's (4) droll style is a (5) side-splitting experience.

Problems: (1) Judgmental; assumes the reader's reaction. (2) Possibly misleading; the cautions are intended to be funny, not to give directions. (3) Is there a consensus and a ranking? The phrase adds nothing about the book, and its accuracy is hard to determine; one or two favorable reviews do not justify such a sweeping statement. (4) *Droll* is a descriptive adjective meaning that the author wanted to provoke laughter. It's useful to know the author's intentions; no problem here. (5) The writer liked the book, but that doesn't count. It's judgmental to say the author succeeded in his intention to be funny; that's up to the reader to decide.

Comment: Overall, the annotation says a lot about what other people think. The only information on content is that the book is about camping reminiscences. There should be more feeling for the content, not merely commentary on it. The language can show that the book is funny without saying so. Note that the editor will have to go back to the source material to obtain content examples.

Edited/rewritten: Twenty-seven droll sketches that originally appeared in *Field and Stream*. Dealing primarily with camping reminiscences, they poke fun at the author's experiences with an inept hunting dog, intruding cows, ne'er-do-well companions, and a national park.

Controversial subjects

More dangerous is taking a position on controversial subjects. Proponents of opposing positions could rightfully expect equal space and support.

The Library does not take sides

Origins
by Richard E. Leakey and Roger Lewin

Annotation: (1) This book has been described as the best work on man's origins and development. The authors explain the emergence of man out of Africa and into modern life. (2) Some new approaches (3) to controversial topics are discussed, such as the growth of intelligence, the nature of man, and the names of species.

Problems: (1) The statement, which could reflect a single reviewer's opinion, seems to be a strong endorsement of the book and the positions taken. (2) What new approaches? The premise and conclusion are missing. Also, approaches remain *new* only until the next book on the subject is written: avoid words about timeliness. (3) Sources indicate that the controversy is about cooperation as opposed to aggression; the areas listed are details of that. A statement is needed about the authors' stand on this subject.

Comment: The NLS collection contains books by prominent anthropologists who take different or opposing positions. If the subject is controversial, the Library of Congress can't appear to promote one point of view.

Rewritten: Explains the emergence of man out of Africa and into modern life. Some controversial topics are discussed, such as the growth of intelligence, the nature of man, and the names of species. The authors consider cooperation and social organization more significant in human development than aggression. (Note that the purist might prefer *humans, humankind,* or *human beings* to the use of *man*. Any

of these words are appropriate, but less forceful in this context. It's a judgment call.)

The author's opinion

Most dangerous of all is expressing the author's opinion as that of the Library of Congress. Be sure the annotation explains that the thesis is the author's.

Opinions should be those of the author

The Zapping of America
by Paul Brodeur

Annotation: (1) The dangers of microwave radiation have been covered up by numerous government agencies. (2) The author exposes the inherent dangers of microwaves. His examples range from the (3) seemingly benign microwave oven to the (4) well-publicized (5) intentional irradiation of embassy officials in Moscow.

Problems: (1) That's a rather sweeping statement for a government agency to make about other government agencies! (2) Wrong placement in the annotation; should come first as the main emphasis. (3) Questionable modifier; *benign* means harmless only in medical parlance. Its more common definitions include of gentle disposition, gracious, and kindly—terms more appropriate to people than objects. (4) Modifier that time may erase. The publicity occurred before the book was written and long before the book was published. By the time the book is recorded, distributed to network libraries, and available to readers, the publicity may be long forgotten. (5) Modifier that must be considered for accuracy; the intention is unproved at the time of writing. However, the assumption is the author's and listed as his example. To remove it would not reflect the content of the book.

Edited: Exposes the inherent dangers of microwaves. The author claims that the hazards posed by microwave radiation have been covered up by numerous government agencies. His examples

range from the household microwave oven to the intentional irradiation of embassy officials in Moscow.

Does the annotation describe the book?

Read the annotation and consider the content the annotation describes. What can readers expect the book to be like?

Now go to the background material—reviews, the book cover, and the table of contents. Flip through the book and scan for tone and approach. Is this the same book? If not, editing is not sufficient; rewriting is needed.

Can the reader tell what he is ordering?

The Ecstasy of Owen Muir
by Ring Lardner Jr.

Annotation: Ironic novel of a young American and seeker of truth who is sent to prison for pacifism. Later he joins the army, is wounded, and [is] discharged. He then launches himself in a business career, marries his secretary, and converts to her religion of Catholicism. Eventually they part and he joins a monastic order. Some strong language.

Problem: The annotation covers plot—exhaustively. The background material indicates that what happens isn't of primary importance; the point is what the author thinks about situations described. Because the author is one of the creators of M*A*S*H, the background material is very likely to be correct. *Ironic novel* is useful, but it isn't strong enough or long enough to balance all that plot. More research is needed.

Rewritten: Satiric novel about a young American truth-seeker who is sent to prison for pacifism. Later episodes with the army, in a business career, and in a monastic order provide vehicles for slashing commentary on war, racism, big business, and organized religion. Some strong language.

Emma Watson: The Watsons Completed
by Joan Aiken

Annotation: Aiken completes this story of the Watsons begun by Jane Austen in 1804. After living with an aunt for fourteen years, Emma, the youngest of a large family, returns home. It falls to Emma and her favorite sister, Elizabeth, to deal with the **foibles of their siblings, including an elopement, a fatal accident, and the revelation of an old scandal.**

Comment: The editor's attention should be caught immediately by *foibles* (oddities of personality) followed by three plot elements that seem much more than peccadillos. Checking the source material shows that the main point—the dreary prospect for two dowerless women—has been omitted. The sisters do, however, deal with *foibles*, as well as events, and assigning these to people catches the spirit of the book.

Rewritten: Aiken continues a novel begun by Jane Austen in 1804. After living with an aunt for fourteen years, Emma, the youngest of a large family, returns home to face a spinsterhood of genteel poverty with her favorite sister, Elizabeth. It falls to them to deal with the foibles and misadventures of their siblings, assorted relatives, and eccentric neighbors.

Editors should also ask:

Three questions

- Is there enough information?
- Is the emphasis correct?
- Does the information lead to the proper conclusion?

Even when all the factual material in an annotation is correct, the reader can still be misled about the book's content.

Right amount of information

Is there enough information? The whole plot does not need to be there, and should not be there. Too much information leaves nothing to the reader's imagination and can

be misleading. But there does have to be enough information for separate parts to make sense together.

Lion at Sea
by Max Hennessy

Annotation: The startlingly courageous adventures of Midshipman Kelly Maguire of the Royal Navy at the outbreak of World War I. Assigned to patrol duty on an obsolete battle cruiser in the North Sea, he is captured by the Turks but escapes with the help of a sexy Arab princess.

Problem: The question is not hard to find: How did the Turks and the sexy Arab princess get to the North Sea? Either something is missing or more explanation is needed. Research shows that quite a lot is missing; the book covers most of the major naval battles of the war. *Startlingly courageous adventures* sets the tone well, but the rest of the annotation needs help.

Rewritten: The startlingly courageous adventures of Midshipman Kelly Maguire of the Royal Navy during World War I. At first assigned to patrol duty on an obsolete battle cruiser in the North Sea, he is later captured by the Turks after Gallipoli, helped to escape by a sexy Arab princess, and involved in the Battle of Jutland.

Is the emphasis correct? The annotation must highlight the point of the book. Just listing facts is not sufficient.

Author's point clear

Education in the United States:
An Interpretive History
by Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak

Annotation: A chronological social history of American educational ideas and institutions, from the Revolutionary War (1) to the present. A number of topics are discussed including the role of schools in American society, (2) equality in education, and

the (2) drive to preserve the status quo in social inequality.

Problems: (1) Phrase indicating currentness of the book. (2) The last two phrases seem contradictory. They do reflect the book's content, but tying them together in that form does not show how the authors approached the subjects. The contradiction needs to be emphasized, not ignored.

Edited: Chronological social history of American educational ideas and institutions, from the Revolution to the 1970s. Discussions cover the role of schools in American society. The authors contrast the goal of equality in education with the tendency to preserve social inequality.

The Least of These My Brethren: A Doctor's Story of Hope and Miracles on an Inner-City AIDS Ward

by Daniel J. Baxter, M.D.

Annotation: A physician's account of life and death amid the squalor of New York City's largest designated AIDS center. Relates (1) the stories of drug addicts, prostitutes, and other social outcasts (2) who are facing death with AIDS. (3) In spite of it all, the author affirms his belief in the value of human life. Strong language. 1997.

Problem: This one falls apart in the middle with weak and vague words that do not develop the point being made about the ward itself and almost impossible conditions. (1) *Stories of* generally implies background information about individuals, while the point here is their attitudes in the ward. (2) We already know they are facing death; this space can be better used. (3) *In spite of it all* is a cliché; *it all* needs clarification. For proper emphasis, the annotation has to build from *squalor,* a well-chosen word, through frustration to affirmation.

Rewritten: A physician's account of life and death amid the squalor of New York City's largest AIDS

center. Relates the difficulties of providing care for uncooperative drug addicts, prostitutes, and other social outcasts. Despite all the hardships and frustrations, the author affirms his belief in the value of every human life. Strong language.

Note the subtle difference made by inserting *every* before *human life,* changing the focus from a generality to the individuals, *even the least of these,* of the title. The title also identifies the author as a doctor, making the M.D. after his name and physician's in the first sentence unnecessary.

Nature and scope of the book

Is the reader led to the proper conclusion? The proper conclusion is what the book is all about, not about how it begins or how it ends. It also includes the tone of the book: serious, humorous, folksy, or frightening.

Waxwork
by Peter Lovesey

Annotation: In the 1880s, Detective Sgt. Cribb of Scotland Yard methodically investigates the case of a proper Victorian lady who confesses to poisoning her photographer husband's assistant because she was being blackmailed. **Upon close examination of her statement, an impossible detail reveals her confession to be false.**

Problem: The background material says that *the impossible detail* is what got the detective interested and later mentions a surprise ending. Research shows that the detail was carefully contrived to negate the confession. She did it! The ending can't be revealed to readers, and they can't be given the impression that the false confession was the end of the matter. There are also some style, tense, and wordiness problems.

Rewritten: In the 1880s, Detective Sergeant Cribb of Scotland Yard methodically investigates the case of a proper Victorian lady who has admitted to poisoning her photographer husband's assistant. **She's**

about to be hanged—and her confession may be false!

Comment: Note that the rewritten version is not only more succinct and suspenseful but leads the reader into the book instead of implying an ending.

Usually you can correct problems in the same way that you add interest: by rearranging language or elements, inserting more precise and descriptive words, eliminating wordiness, adding or deleting facts to achieve conciseness and balance.

If the annotation is too far off the mark, it will have to be rewritten. There is no way to edit annotations that are all judgment and no content.

Annotation: This is one of the best stories that has been written by an American about a ballerina.

Problem: Yes, but what is the book about? What does it say? Some content has to be discovered and inserted.

When the general content is interesting, describes the book, and is correct grammatically and stylistically, the editor can move on to the final step.

Are the facts accurate?

Take one last look at names, dates, and places. Too much work has gone into all this to leave a silly mistake. Some annotations present reasons to check.

Take one more look at details

Annotation: World War II intrudes on the already troubled life of **Eleanor,** handicapped by a reading disability that makes college seem impossible. Ironically, the war frees **Karen** to accept herself and pursue her own life.

Problem: What have Eleanor's problems to do with Karen? Checking shows that there is only one character; a mistake has been made with the name.

Annotation: A continuous narrative of the Bible **from Genesis to Exodus,** told in 168 stories in simple language.

Comment: It's possible; a great deal of story material appears in the first two books of the Bible, but that's not very far into Judaeo-Christian lore. Checking is justified, and shows that the phrase should read *from Genesis through Revelation,* encompassing the whole span of the Christian Bible.

Annotation: Historical tale of love, courtly splendor, rebellion, and royal tragedy. Portrays the reign of Richard III, his fragile and tender relationship with Queen Anne, and the fiery battle at **Armageddon.**

Comment: Richard met his Armageddon at Bosworth Field. Don't leave the biblical allusion; substitute the correct place.

Leave nothing to chance

Even without something that catches the attention, verify the facts with the background material and, if necessary, with the book.

George Burns and the Hundred-Year Dash
by Martin Gottfried

Annotation: Life of the beloved star of stage and screen who died in 1996 at the age of one hundred. Discusses his show business beginnings in vaudeville, where he later achieved considerable fame teamed with his wife, Gracie Allen, as Burns and Allen. Also examines Burns's career resurgence **in 1976 with his Oscar-winning performance in *Oh God!*** Some strong language.

Comment: Except to a dedicated Burns fan or movie buff, this statement would not arouse editorial instincts. However, the reviews attribute the Oscar (as supporting actor) to an earlier film. Checking with the book is warranted and reveals that casting Burns as God followed and was because of the previous role. The book jacket obscures this point, but all

the other sources, including the book itself, are clear. The statement should read *in 1975 with his Oscar-winning performance in* The Sunshine Boys.

Check again

Back to basics

Before leaving the entry, take a last look to be sure that all the material is consistent: names should correspond to the source information and be spelled the same throughout, including in the title and author lines and the one-liner (*See* One-line annotation, p. 165); places should be spelled correctly and consistently at each reference. Look again at subject and verb agreement and parallel structure. Check again that words other than names are spelled correctly; the eye often sees what it expects to be there, especially when its attention has been caught by other problems.

Part Two:
Style and Presentation

Background

Considerations and procedures listed in this section are for NLS annotations. As stated in earlier sections on adhering to style and editing for style:

> *Style* in this context means the treatment of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and numbers that have various acceptable forms. For consistency, one form is selected and used throughout. NLS uses *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition* as basic references. It has also adopted some style practices of its own that have been found to be more workable for annotations.
>
> Other annotation writers do not, of course, have to follow these forms. But every individual or group should use some formal style reference or develop practices that are adhered to consistently. Otherwise, there is chaos.
>
> The style chosen will often differ from the style used in the book being annotated; publishers have, or should have, their own style practices. This problem occurs most often with capitalization: But it's capitalized in the book! It doesn't matter what the book does; if you have a style, you should adhere to it. Otherwise, you are at the mercy of a different style for every publisher, or possibly for every book.

Topics in this section are presented in the order in which they occur in book announcements, from title entries through handling of dates. Some of the topics discussed are *treatments*—how certain situations are handled—which are then subject to formal style considerations.

Also covered are two items that are prepared at the same time as the standard book announcement, making use of the print book before it goes out for brailling or recording. The one-line annotation is created as a separate entity, and a suggested catalog category is determined. These items will later be used to provide information to patrons.

Titles

The title page is the authority for words and spelling; the *Chicago Manual of Style* is the authority for style (presentation). In some cases, treatments are NLS practice.

The purpose is a consistent look—as far as possible—for publications and information to patrons. Cataloging rules are different.

Initial caps

Capitals—initial letters only

- First and last words, regardless of part of speech
- All major parts of speech—nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives

Note: Length is not a criterion; some verbs are very short. Watch especially for *is, are, was,* and *were.*

Lower case

Lower case

- Coordinate conjunctions—*and, or, nor,* and *but*
- Articles—*a, an,* and *the*
- *To* as part of infinitive
- *As* regardless of part of speech
- Prepositions regardless of length

Note: The preposition is sometimes part of verb form and is treated as a verb.

- Run Down Clues—*down* is part of the verb.
- Run down the Hill—*down* is a preposition.

Living Through Mourning: Finding Hope and Comfort When a Loved One Has Died— *through* is part of the verb; note the change of meaning when it is treated as a preposition.

Punctuation—and other strange marks

Punctuation and ampersands

Punctuation follows Chicago style; change the form of the title-page where needed.

- Add **commas** for sense and in series of words, including before *and*. (**Note:** brackets indicate addition to original.)

  If Blindness Strikes[,] Don't Strike Out

  Sea to Shining Sea: People[,] Travels[,] Places

  Spring Jaunts: Some Walks, Excursions[,] and Personal Explorations of Town, Country[,] and Seashore

- Retain **dashes, question marks,** and **exclamation points.**

- Use **quotation marks** when they appear on title page to denote a spoken phrase, a familiar saying, a nickname, or a popular name.

  "Grizille, Save the Children!"

  Best of E.E. "Doc" Smith

  Be Expert with Map and Compass: The Complete "Orienting" Handbook

  Should You Shut Your Eyes When You Kiss; or, How to Survive "The Best Years of Your Life"

- Retain an **ellipsis** when it is used to indicate something missing; substitute a dash or other appropriate punctuation when dots are simply a design element.

  …And Ladies of the Club

  Aren't You the One Who…?

- But change dots to a dash in **Come before Winter… and Share My Hope** (in this case, the ellipsis indicates a pause, not an omission)

- Add **hyphens** sparingly to adjective forms when needed to make meaning clear or when usually used by NLS; otherwise, retain title-page punctuation for simplicity.

  Zoo Vet: Adventures of a Wild[-]Animal Doctor
  (Add a hyphen between *wild* and *animal* to make clear that the animal is wild, not the doctor.)

- Eliminate **colons;** substitute a comma, semicolon, or dash as appropriate. A colon is used only to separate title from subtitle.

  Title page: A. E. Housman

  Poetry & Prose: A Selection

NLS style: **A.E. Housman: Poetry and Prose—a Selection** (A comma or semicolon could be used instead of the dash. Note that *a* is lowercase after the new punctuation because it is not a first word. (*See* section on subtitles, p. 139.)

- Always write out **ampersands** unless they are part of a corporate logo.

Numbers

Numbers
Use Chicago style: write out numbers through one hundred; write out all numbers if first word of text. Figures are retained for numbers that are part of proper names, such as names of ships or projects. (*See* the section on text style, p. 150, for other usages.)

Dates
Years are always expressed in figures.

1939: In the Shadow of the War

Years

The Great Depression: An Inquiry into the Causes, Course, and Consequences of the Worldwide Depression of the 1930s, as Seen by Contemporaries and in the Light of History (*not* Nineteen Thirties)

- Set apart with commas dates not grammatically related to the title.

Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960

- Use Chicago style for other dates. (*See* section on text style, p. 150.)

Titles within titles

- NLS practice for annotations is to treat all titles within titles in the same way for a consistent look. In text, some titles use quotes and some use italics. (*See* section on text style, p. 149.)

Titles as part of titles

Italicize (or underscore) short stories as part of a book title as well as radio and TV programs, two or more books in one volume, and groups of stories. Italicize all words including initial articles. Do not use commas to separate unless there are three or more titles.

***Wind and Birds and Human Voices* and Other Stories**

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey

Postscript to *The Name of the Rose*

The Communist Manifesto [by] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, with Selections from the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *Capital* by Karl Marx

Just People *and Other Poems for Young Readers* and *Paper/Pen/Poem: A Young Writer's Way to Begin* (This complex title contains two titles that have to be italicized to indicate that they are separate items. In addition, the first title contains a title within a title, which is presented in roman text to distinguish it from the remainder of the title.)

- Italics are used to distinguish titles from other parts of the book title. They are not needed when the title of a short story or other material is also the title of the book or if descriptive information is in a subtitle separated from the title by a colon.

  I Love You, I Hate You, Get Lost (title story and title of book)

  Angel Maker: The Short Stories of Sara Maitland (*Angel Maker* is both the title story and title of book; colon provides separation from subtitle)

- Italicize **periodical names** but treat an initial article as part of the book title rather than the periodical title; lowercase the initial article except when it is the first word of the title.

  Great *Esquire* Fiction: The Finest Stories from the First Fifty Years

  The *New York Times* Book of Annuals and Perennials

  Best Sports Stories from the *Saturday Evening Post*

  ***Farm Journal*'s Country-Style Microwave Cookbook** (The possessive is not part of the periodical title; do not italicize.)

Exceptions

Exceptions

Occasionally rules for capitalization and punctuation should be violated if the original usage is an integral part of the title.

M*A*S*H

H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N

Re: Thinking—How to Succeed by Learning How to Think (The colon is part of the title punctuation; therefore, dashes indicate the subtitle, which has an initial capital.)

Subtitles

Consider the subtitle as another title; the same rules for capitalization and punctuation apply as for titles.

Use

- Subtitles are considered part of the title information and are always used, regardless of length. Do not abbreviate or omit words. Terms such as *stories, poems,* or *a biography* are retained as subtitles.

A second title

- The one exception to the use of subtitles is *A Novel.* This subtitle is omitted because it is understood for fiction and adds no new information. It is, however, used when there are added words as in *A Novel of Suspense.* It is also used if needed for clarification.

  Glory Enough for All: The Battle of the Crater; a Novel of the Civil War (Note that the article following the semicolon is lowercase; *see* the next section)

  Walter Winchell: A Novel (retained because the book could easily be mistaken for a biography without the subtitle)

Punctuation between title and subtitle

A **colon** is used to separate title and subtitle in most cases. Place the colon directly after the title; leave one space before the subtitle.

The mighty colon—introduces a subtitle

Because the colon indicates the beginning of a subtitle, colons should not be used elsewhere in the title or subtitle. If a colon appears elsewhere on the title page, change the punctuation to a comma or semicolon as appropriate. Do not uppercase articles or prepositions that follow; capitals for initial words are used only to indicate a title or subtitle.

Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge; a Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution (Note that the *a* after the semicolon is lowercase.)

Other punctuation

- A **question mark** or **exclamation point** is sufficient for separation. Do not also use a colon.

  Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South

  Crisis Time! Love, Marriage, and the Male at Mid-Life

- A **quotation mark** is not sufficient for separation, because it would not end a sentence in text. Use a colon after the quotation mark to indicate the beginning of a subtitle. Do not use the colon if the quotation ends in an exclamation point or question mark.

  "The Rest of Us": The Rise of America's Eastern European Jews

  "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!" Adventures of a Curious Character

Subtitle after "or"

- **Second title after *or*.** Use a semicolon after the title, lowercase *or,* follow *or* with a comma. Do not use a semicolon after a question mark or exclamation point.

  One Fell Soup; or, I'm Just a Bug on the Windshield of Life

  What's to Become of the Boy? or, Something to Do with Books

Titles within subtitles

NLS practice is essentially the same as for titles within titles: treat the subtitle as a second title and italicize or underscore all titles regardless of whether they would take italics or quotes in text. For subtitles, all short story or novella titles are italicized, because they cannot also be the title of the book.

Use italics

Stories of the Early West: *The Luck of Roaring Camp* and Sixteen Other Exciting Tales of Mining and Frontier Days

Eda LeShan on Living Your Life: Based on the CBS Radio Network Series *Getting Along*

The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult; a Meditation on Life, Spirit, Art, and the Making of the Film *The Color Purple* Ten Years Later

Victorian Villainies: *The Great Tontine, The Rome Express, In the Fog, The Beetle*

Three Tales of My Father's Dragon: *My Father's Dragon; Elmer and the Dragon; The Dragons of Blueland* (For the last two examples, the listed stories explain the title. The need for italics would be obvious if the *and* that is understood between the last two titles were actually present.)

Series name as subtitle

Subtitle identifies series

For our readers, it is useful to list series names as subtitles, because they then appear in author and title indexes for easy identification. Handling style practices for these books is difficult, since publishers indicate series differently and not always in the same way for titles in the same series. Practices listed are designed to give patrons useful information in a consistent format and where it can be easily located.

If a book is known to be part of a series, such information should appear as a subtitle even if the information does not appear on the title page; generally it will appear on the book jacket, on the verso title page, or in a list of other books by the author. This practice includes both series presented sequentially and those that feature a particular character or group but can be read in any order. It does not include a publisher's series such as Great Books of the World.

Doom of the Darksword: The Darksword Trilogy, Volume 2

Donovan's Daughter: The Californians, Book 4

Darkness and Light: Dragonlance Saga; Preludes, Volume 1

Prisoner's Base: A Nero Wolf Mystery

Mischief: An 87th Precinct Mystery

- Use **roman type.** Do not underline or put quotes around a series name.

- If **volumes** are listed, put a comma after the series title and place the volume number at the end; capitalize and write out *volume;* and use arabic numerals. Use a semicolon to separate if the series title follows the subtitle or if volume and dates precede the subtitle. If only a numeral is listed, use *volume* rather than *book.*

  Thomas Jefferson: The Formative Years, 1743–1775; Founding Fathers Series, Volume 6

  Montana! Wagons West, Volume 10 (Note that the exclamation point is sufficient for separation, and the colon is not used.)

Series name as title

In some cases, the series name is used as the title for all volumes and information about the particular volume becomes the subtitle.

Except...

> **The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume 1, 1902–1941; I, Too, Sing America**

Consistency

Frequently, series information is inconsistent for individual volumes. Some volumes, usually the first one or two in the series, may not have a series title; others may have a variety of forms.

For consistency, a form (or variation on that form) should be established. Often several books in a series will have been produced and cataloged before the need for a consistent form becomes apparent.

Establish a form

Subtitles determined for use in book announcements after some volumes have been produced should be added to the database for use in subsequent publications.

> **The Summer of the Danes: The Eighteenth Chronicle of Brother Cadfael, of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, at Shrewsbury** (subtitle from the book jacket). The title page does not list a series title; the also by page identifies these books as the Brother Cadfael Chronicles, and further confuses by listing them in random order.

This popular series is troublesome. The most common form is

(title): The (number) Chronicle of Brother Cadfael but the first few titles weren't numbered, and some volumes later in the series also don't list numbers. The common form should be used when the number is listed or can be determined by placement in the series. Otherwise an alternate form resembling that would be

(title): A Chronicle of Brother Cadfael

The additional information on the book jacket should not be used. It is not consistent with other titles, adds little information, and takes up space better used for the annotation.

Series titles in text

Occasionally a series title is used in the annotation text rather than as a subtitle. This generally occurs when the first one or two volumes have appeared without a series identification and this one purports to be the last. For series titles in text, lowercase any initial article and use roman type.

Sequences

Show placement in series

For series that should be read sequentially, NLS practice is to indicate in the annotation text the title the current book follows: "In this sequel to *A Boy's War (RC 43286)*" or "This sequel to *Daughters of Albion (RC 35723)* opens in the mid-1960s." The current volume could also precede a previous title and be listed as "Prequel to *Becoming a Man (RC 41664),*" if written after the previous title, or "Followed by *Becoming a Man (RC 41664),*" if simply produced later by NLS to fill in a gap. In these cases the series subtitle should not be included in the text.

Book number needed

Note that the book number is always listed so that patrons know what to order. Only books in the collection and produced in the same format as the current title are mentioned as cross references.

Authors

Keep names simple and recognizable.

Note. This section describes how the information will appear in print. In some cases the NLS database requires specific practices or placements to achieve these results, especially in dealing with suffixes and coauthors. For these treatments, consult the appropriate computer instructions.

Forms of names

- **Popular usage.** Use the form of the author's name generally known to the public, not the bibliographic form. Generally, this version will be what is listed on the title page.

  A.A. Milne, not Alan Alexander

One author

  e.e. cummings (lower case)

  Louisa May Alcott (known with middle name)

  Lloyd C. Douglas (used middle initial)

Parts of a name

- **Initials.** Keep tight, no space between letters (NLS practice). *See* the examples above.

- **Suffixes.** Jr., Sr., and Esq. are abbreviated. There is no punctuation before either these or numerals.

  Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

  John Smith Esq.

  John D. Rockefeller III

Coauthors

Two of them

Follow the form for a single author; connect with *and* rather than ampersand.

Multiple authors

List the first author followed by *and others* without punctuation. No more than two names are ever listed.

Many

> Alfred H. Kelly, Winfred A. Harbison, and Herman Belz—delete all but the first author and substitute *and others:* Alfred H. Kelly and others

Editors, selectors, compilers, and the like

Editors and others

Use the same rules as for authors; the form is *edited by John E. Lewis,* not John E. Lewis, ed.

Translators

List a translator only if the information is significant; that is, the translator is well known or the version is important.

> **The Iliad**
> by Homer, translated by Edward Fitzgerald

Illustrators

Don't list illustrators, even for PRINT/BRAILLE books; the focus is not on pictorial material.

Honorifics

For simplicity and conciseness, titles and degrees are rarely used. If the author's authority in the field is important, this information should be incorporated into the annotation.

- **Titles before author's name.** Almost never used. Eliminate Dr., Professor, Sister, Rev., and the like. An exception is for British practice; do use titles for nobility and knighthoods if they are the familiar form.

Sir Walter Scott

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Lord Peter Wimsey

- **Degrees after author's name.** Almost never used. Eliminate Ph.D., Order of…, etc.

An exception is M.D. (initials tight) when the topic is related to medicine and the author's credentials are not in the annotation; don't use the degree if the annotation covers the writer's authority. It is preferable to provide this information in the annotation.

Text style

The main reason for following a particular style manual is consistency. NLS practices for capitalization, type styles, word forms, punctuation, and other text treatments are based on the *Chicago Manual of Style.* Some aspects of Chicago style have been interpolated from the general approach when the particulars are not spelled out; in a few cases the style has been altered to fit NLS needs.

Annotation writers cannot depend on presentations in the book or in reviews (which often differ from each other) to be correct for NLS annotations. The authors and editors of these documents may have been using a different style manual or none at all.

The following lists cover situations encountered frequently. For items not listed, consult the manual.

Type style—titles in text (*See* Chicago, 7.129-7.148)

Use italics

Italics (sometimes shown by an underscore)

- books titles and book numbers
- musical compositions (long)
- movies
- radio and TV series
- periodicals (but initial article is lower case and not italicized)
- plays
- poems (long)
- works of art

Use quotes

Quotes

- articles from periodicals
- chapter titles
- musical compositions (short)

- poems (short)
- radio and TV programs—episodes
- short stories

Roman type

Use roman

- musical compositions (name of form plus key)
- series (treat initial article as for periodicals)
- parts of a book—preface, foreword, introduction (all lowercase)

Dates and times (*See* Chicago, 8.33-8.48)

Centuries

Write out; hyphenate as adjective.

- set in the twelfth century;
- twelfth-century castle

Decades

The calendar...

Write out, use full date, or use apostrophe for century.

- sixties and seventies
- 1960s (no apostrophe before *s*)
- 60s and 70s

Years

Use figures in most cases. Can abbreviate in familiar phrases.

- written between 1975 and 1977
- spirit of ’76
- class of ’97

Month and year

Write out month; no punctuation between month and year.

- For the United States, World War II began in December 1941.

Day, month, and year

Treat the year as an appositive; surround with commas.

- The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, led to the declaration of war against Japan.

Month and day

Write out month; use cardinal number.

- December 7 *(Not* Dec. 7th)

Dateline

The brief phrases sometimes used to lead quickly into historical novels show two different things: date and place. Therefore separation is needed. A comma is sufficient when there is no other punctuation. When either the date or the place contains one or more commas, the dividing punctuation is a semicolon.

- India, 1886.
- Dallas, Texas; 1963
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; July 1776

... and the clock

Times of day

Generally use words; use figures if specific time is important.

- four o'clock
- around midnight
- bedtime at eight

But

- the 6:20 train
- armistice signed at 11:02

Seasons

Use lower case (spring, summer, fall, winter); no punctuation if followed by year.

Eras

Historical and cultural periods and events (*See* Chicago, 7.60-7.67)
In general, use lowercase for eras, cultural periods, and events of some duration.

- the depression
- early to mid-eighteenth century
- colonial period
- ancient Rome
- westward movement
- nuclear age
- the twenties

Use capitals when these are derived from proper names, are recognized archaeological periods, or are specific single events. Some names are capitalized by tradition or to avoid ambiguity.

- Great Depression
- Victorian Age
- Roaring Twenties
- Middle Ages
- Stone Age
- Boston Tea Party

For simplicity, prefer lowercase when the meaning is clear. When in doubt, check Chicago, which is sometimes also in doubt and allows some latitude.

Genres

Genres

All genre designations should be lowercased, even if a period (Gothic) or place/direction (West) gave name to the genre. Note that Regency romances and Victorian novels refer to a particular setting in time and place and retain the capital letters; these are not yet genres.

NLS usage is to capitalize Romantic for writers and works of that cultural period to distinguish them from the romance genre.

Titles and offices (*See* Chicago, 7.15-7.24)
In general, capitalize civil, military, religious, and professional titles and titles of nobility when they immediately precede a personal name. Lowercase titles following a personal name or used alone in place of a name.

- President Washington
- George Washington, president of the United States
- the United States president George Washington (*president* is descriptive, not a title)
- when George Washington was president and Martha his first lady

Be careful about using *Reverend* as a title.

- the Reverend John Smith or the Reverend Mr. Smith *never* (properly) Rev. Smith or Reverend Smith

The correct form is awkward; rewrite to avoid the problem when possible.

Religious terms (*See* Chicago, 7.74-7.92)
In general, capitalize what are clearly proper nouns, especially names for God (as supreme being), deities (in religions with several), revered persons, sacred writings, events, concepts, and specific services.

- God, Jehovah, Allah, Pan, Thor, Shiva, Isis, Virgin Mary, the Prophet (Islam), Bible, Scriptures, Koran, Crucifixion, Redemption, Holy Communion

Lowercase adjectives derived from sacred books (generally), general references to services, and objects of religious significance.

- biblical, scriptural, talmudic, gospels, mass, service, seder, confirmation, bar mitzvah, baptism, holy water, rosary, shofar, phylacteries, sanctuary

Additions to text

Several types of information can be added to the end of the annotation text as appropriate for the particular book. These pieces always appear in the same order for consistency.

Taglines—descriptive phrases
Strong language: to indicate that profanity is used fairly freely.

Some strong language: to indicate that profanity is present but is mild or infrequent.

Violence: to indicate that brutal acts are described in detail.

Some violence: to indicate that brutality is present but is not frequent.

Content that could be disturbing

Explicit descriptions of sex: to indicate a number of detailed sexual passages.

Some explicit descriptions of sex: to indicate no more than two or three detailed sexual passages.

Descriptions of sex: to indicate a number of erotic but not detailed sexual passages, such as one indicating a passionate kiss and caress of the breasts with an indication that the couple proceeds from there but without detailed description of what follows.

Some descriptions of sex: to indicate two or three erotic but not detailed sexual passages.

Note that *some* is used in every case to indicate that the occurrences are slight and relatively inoffensive. The decision to use *some,* as well as the decision to use a tagline at all, is often subjective. What is distasteful to some readers

is not distasteful to all. The best guideline is to consider the age distribution of NLS patrons, more than half of whom are sixty-five years old or older. Times and mores change. Rhett Butler's famous 'Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn!' would not cause even a blink today. But this large group of readers originally formed their tastes about what is fit to print in an earlier and gentler era. It is best to be somewhat conservative. Those readers not easily disturbed can ignore these descriptive phrases, or even choose books because of them.

We use only one tagline. If more than one element is present, the two descriptive phrases are joined by *and,* rather than appearing separately. If all three are present, they are separated by commas with *and* before the last element.

- Strong language, violence, and descriptions of sex *not,* Strong language. Violence. Descriptions of sex.

Put* some *last

There is no particular order in which these phrases must appear, although language is generally listed first and sex last if there is no context reason to do otherwise, primarily because it is more euphonious for the longer phrase to appear last. However, when one of the phrases is modified by *some,* that phrase should appear last so that the reader will not assume that the *some* also modifies others in the series. To ensure correct interpretation, *some* is repeated each time it is needed: Violence, some strong language, and some descriptions of sex. Note that in this case the word without the modifier moves to the first position in the tagline.

The phrases about sex cannot be shortened by leaving out *descriptions of*—which is a temptation when space is limited. Leaving out these words alters the meaning; there are only words about acts and, obviously, not acts themselves.

A special format

PRINT/BRAILLE

These books are for blind and sighted readers to share. They consist of the original print book with clear plastic overlays containing the braille text. Most of them are picture books for very young readers, but some texts are suitable for those reading up to seventh grade level.

Because letter prefixes to book numbers for this medium are the same as for standard braille books, the difference must be noted in the annotation.

Age group targeted

Grade levels

The annotator determines information about reading levels for juvenile titles according to the content of the book and placements in reviews and reading lists. The same phrases are always used. They are

- For preschool-grade 2.
- For grades K-3.
- For grades 2-4.
- For grades 3-6.
- For grades 4-7.
- For grades 5-8.
- For grades 6-9.
- For junior high readers.
- For senior high readers.
- For junior and senior high readers.
- For junior and senior high and older readers.
- For senior high and older readers.

For older readers. Note that in the two places where *for older readers* is part of the phrase, it means that the book is also suitable for adults, not that it can be read by children older than the designated level; any book can be read by people outside the target group, depending on the interests of the reader.

The *for older readers* tagline can also be added for some books designated as for children, even young children, to indicate that they are worthwhile for adults, especially older adults who prefer information in short and concise forms. These books typically include biographies, nature materials, poetry, fables and folktales, and some historical selections—including both fiction and nonfiction. In these cases the addition of *and older readers* indicates not only that adults can enjoy them, but that advisors and others selecting books can consider these titles for seniors with short attention spans.

Prizes
Listing prizes won helps the reader evaluate the worth of the book selected. Caldecott and Newbery winners are always in demand. Adult book awards indicate serious literary value.

Note that the listing consists of prizes for the particular book, not the writer. A Pulitzer Prize-winning author could be indicated in the annotation text.

Bestsellers
Some readers are interested in keeping up with the latest popular books. Therefore bestsellers are noted in the annotation. Designation of a bestseller depends on the title's appearance on nationwide bestseller lists for several weeks.

For books in English, *Bestseller* is the last item listed in the annotation before the date.

Foreign language
For books in languages other than English, the particular language must be indicated. In these cases, the last item before the date is a two-word phrase such as Spanish language. For the occasional bilingual book, the phrase is In English and Spanish or Bilingual book in English and Spanish.

Dates and time

Dates at the end of annotations

Generally show when the book was written

Dates associated with an annotation inform readers about when the book was written. As with other information intended primarily for readers, these dates do not mirror cataloging practices; the purpose is convey to readers specific information where possible and give a general indication otherwise.

Usual practice

For most books, the date at the end of the annotation, usually a copyright date, suffices; for others, further information about the time frame must be incorporated in the text of the annotation.

For nonfiction, the date is important to indicate how current the information is. For fiction, knowledge of the century or decade the book was created can give a clue to the writing style and prevailing attitudes of the period.

Earliest for fiction, most recent for nonfiction

The usual practice for determining the date at the end of the annotation is to refer first to the copyright date. Dates for current works present no problem; the copyright date, also generally the year of publication, will be used.

Copyright dates are also used for older works as far as possible. For fiction, the date will usually be the oldest copyright date, which indicates the time of the creative effort in producing the book. For nonfiction, the date will usually be the most recent copyright date, because that indicates when the latest information was incorporated. These dates are chosen for the end of the annotation because they are the most accurate source of information; the copyright symbol is not used.

Exceptions

The following situations do not follow the usual practice.

Public domain. Some books (usually works in the public domain) do not show copyright dates, and other means of conveying the information must be found. If the year the work was written is known, that date can appear at the end of the annotation. Alternatively, the time of creation can appear in the body of the text, with phrases such as *nineteenth-century novel, classic work written in 1776,* or *first published in 1895.* For these titles, it is appropriate to use the publication date to follow the annotation as an indication of when the particular book was available in print.

Sometimes put time information in text

Older works with new matter. Some confusion arises when a book is reissued with a new foreword, introduction, notes, or other type of commentary. This material often leads to a new copyright date, which need not be used at the end of the annotation, since it applies only to the new piece and not to the body of the book. It can be also ignored in the text of the annotation if the addition is short and adds little to the original content.

However, if the person who developed the new section is well known or a current authority in the field, his or her contribution should be handled in the body of the annotation, and the same sentence can indicate that the book is a recent edition. A sentence such as *This 1992 edition contains a foreword by…* will cover most situations, while the date at the end of the annotation will, as usual, show the original date of the book. Alternatively, the sentence could read *This edition of the late-nineteenth-century classic contains a critical commentary by…,* with the publication date following the annotation. Either form is appropriate, as long as information on both time periods is provided for the reader.

Older works with copyright renewals. Some works, when renewed, remain under copyright for a very long time, and using the renewal copyright date will not convey the time of creation. In these cases, the original copyright or publication date should be used, along with the current publication date as appropriate.

Phrases to indicate the age of the material are similar to those for works in the public domain.

Translations. Similar information is needed for translations of works that appeared earlier in another country and sometimes under another name. A sentence should appear in the annotation listing the country and date of the original publication and also the original name, if different. The date at the end will then be that of the English edition being used.

Collections. Dates for collections that contain pieces written at different times also have to be handled within the annotation, as in *essays written between 1945 and 1960,* or *culled from his writings over the three decades from the 1960s through the 1980s.* If the pieces are associated with a particular publication, the phrase could read *stories originally appearing in the* New Yorker *during the 1980s.* In these cases the most recent copyright date is used at the end of the annotation; this may be the date of the compilation.

Occasionally fiction pieces that appeared separately in one or more periodicals are reworked into a novel. In these cases there can be copyright dates for each section, but only the final one denoting the complete work is used. If the pieces are widely separated, a note might be added to the text.

Time-sensitive phrases

No annotation should contain phases like *to the present time, current research,* or *recent upheavals in the Soviet*

"Now" doesn't last

Union, even if the book does. Annotations remain in the database as long as the book is available, and what is *present, current,* or *recent* when the annotation is written will not be so for very long. The language of the annotation should always be specific: *to the early 1990s, information released in 1997, the 1991 upheavals in the Soviet Union.*

Eras

Adjectives referring to a time period should not be used in the same way for books written in that time and books written about that time. Consider the annotation for **The Woman in White** by Wilkie Collins, which begins *A Victorian melodrama concerning…* and the one for **Mysteries of Winterthurn** by Joyce Carol Oates, which begins *A nineteenth-century Victorian-gothic extravaganza of…* The Collins book is truly Victorian, an early mystery classic, but the date at the end could be the publication date, because the annotation describes the time of writing. The Oates book was written in 1985, and to clarify that, the language should say something on the order of *set in the nineteenth century or written in the Victorian-gothic style of the nineteenth century.* The date at the end is not definitive.

Really old and sounding old

Regency romances, which would seem to be similar, do not present the same problem, since the genre did not exist before the middle of the twentieth century, when it was popularized, or possibly invented, by Georgette Heyer.

Eras also present difficulties when the same word has another meaning, as for Romantic period and romantic novel. To differentiate, NLS uses an initial capital letter for the era, even though this practice deviates from Chicago style.

Dates and the database

These practices about dates have not been in effect throughout the history of the NLS program. At times, the publication date of the particular edition used for recording

Once things were different

or brailling was listed without any indication of the real date or era in the annotation. Therefore, the database contains anomalies such as dates in the 1960s or 1970s for works that were written several decades earlier and twentieth-century dates for classic authors who have long been dead. People doing subject bibliographies should be aware of this situation and plan to correct dates, rewrite a piece of the annotation, or both when assembling lists of retrospective titles.

One-line annotations

NLS has long used one-line annotations (generally referred to as one-liners) as supplementary information about recorded books in the braille edition of *Braille Book Review (BBR).* Full annotations are given for braille books as in the print edition; in addition, the braille edition contains one-liners for the recorded books in the companion issue of *TBT,* as a short-form memory aid. For full annotations, braille readers can receive either the print or the cassette edition of *TBT* or refer to the on-line version. Some network libraries use the one-liner rather than the full annotation in their database.

For many years one-liners also appeared on the order forms for the disc edition of TBT, which is no longer produced.

One-liners have a defined amount of space in publications and on the computer screen; the term means one short line, not a one-sentence summary of indefinite length. Therefore, the writer must be succinct and inclusive.

Grade levels
For juvenile and young adult books, the most important information is the age group addressed. Therefore the one-liner for these books is always the grade level, which should also be in the full annotation. *See* list, p. 187.

Some juvenile or young adult books are also part of a series. In that case the grade level takes precedence. If the accompanying title is short enough to fit, the sequel note should follow.

Prequels and sequels
Because readers have indicated a strong interest in books in series, the most important information about such books is that they are part of a series and where they fall within that

series. Therefore, if there is a sequel note, it becomes the one-liner. This information is, of course, also in the full annotation. In general, the first book in a series is listed as *followed by* and all others are listed as *sequel to* the preceding title. Some books are added to popular series as prequels, and it is possible to have more than one title listed as a prequel if the first title has already been produced.

Note that **for this purpose,** books in series are considered to be only those where the action continues sequentially from one title to the next. Titles featuring the same character or group of characters do not list prequels and sequels if the books can be read in any order. Many detective novels, such as those featuring Perry Mason or Nero Wolfe, fall into this category.

Familiar characters

Identify old friends

Since NLS adopted the practice of using the series title as a subtitle if it appears on the title page of any of the books in a series (*see* the section on subtitles, p. 139), many well-known characters or series are identified as part of the title lines. This practice makes indexes more useful and valuable information available almost immediately in book listings. Therefore, one-liners do not need to repeat this information, leaving space for other content.

For familiar characters or favorite series, it is essential that this information be conveyed quickly. If it is not in the title information, it should be included in the one-liner: *Jane Marple investigates…; Sam Sackett trails ….* Even where the series is identified in the subtitle, the character focused on can be useful: *Detective Steve Carella…* (for an 87th Precinct mystery).

Content

Because space is extremely limited, the content of the one-liner should not repeat information already given in the title or author fields. Many nonfiction books convey a great deal about their subject matter in the title and subtitle, so the one-liner should cover other elements such as approach, dates, people involved, or whatever is most pertinent to the particular book. Others only hint at their subject, and the one-liner must lay the content out clearly.

Don't repeat bibliographic information

For fiction titles, the genre is important. One-liners for historical fiction should indicate the time and place, either directly or in connection with a historical event. One-liners for mysteries should lay out the problem to be solved. One-liners for science fiction or fantasy should refer to outer space, a mythical kingdom, starships and space travel, or whatever devices the author has chosen for this exercise in imagination.

Books that do not fall easily into a particular genre need a brief summary of the conflict or plot elements. In general, items that would be useful in the first sentence of a full annotation would also be useful in a one-liner.

Repetition of annotation text

Text is new to patrons

The one-liner and the full annotation are maintained in the same computer record and on the accompanying hard copy and are written and then edited at the same time. Patrons, however, never see both together. The one-liner can use some of the same language as the full annotation, and often makes a good first sentence for the full annotation. All information in the one-liner should be in the full annotation, although not necessarily in the same words; if something is important enough for the limited space, it must be important enough for the larger one.

Catalog subject categories

About NLS catalogs

NLS publishes three basic catalogs listing books produced during the years indicated in the title. *Cassette Books,* which lists adult and young adult books on cassette, is published annually, because by far the largest number of NLS titles are produced on cassette. *Braille Books,* which lists adult and young adult books in braille, is published biennially. *For Younger Readers,* which lists juvenile books produced in both media, is also published biennially. *For Younger Readers* also contains selected young adult books suitable for middle school and junior high readers.

In addition, a cumulative catalog of foreign-language books is produced irregularly, usually about every four years.

Books have been announced; only the arrangement is new

All of these catalogs contain information already made available to patrons in the bimonthly magazines *Braille Book Review* and *Talking Book Topics,* which list books produced for both adults and children since the previous issue. The catalogs enhance this material by giving access through subject categories, which can call attention to books that might have been overlooked in the bimonthly magazines.

Catalogs are available to patrons in several ways. They are published in large print and also in one or more special media. All of these publications can be ordered by patrons and retained for reference. The three basic catalogs are entered into the book collection and produced for loan in the medium most appropriate: on cassette (usually voice indexed) for *Cassette Books* and *For Younger Readers* and in braille for *Braille Books.* In addition, catalogs are posted on the Internet.

The basic catalogs list books under nonfiction and fiction headings further subdivided into subject categories. These

categories are for the general reader and can differ from usual library practice; the intent is to list books under the subject heading where a reader is most likely to look for a particular type of material. Subject categories also break out material of specific interest, such as books relating to blindness and physical handicaps.

Subject categories for catalogs

The list on pp. 177 to 191 is used to assign subject categories and reflects those that have been found most useful over the years. The four-letter code in the first column simplifies inputting information into the computer; it usually consists of the first four letters of the category. Some of the codes assigned to foreign-language books or print/braille are designed deliberately to make this material fall (via alphabetical computer sorts) at the end of the other lists, where it will appear in the catalogs.

Assigning subject categories

These NLS catalogs are not the same as library card catalogs, or the current automated equivalent, in which multiple subject listings may give the reader several points of access to information. Special-format material can be difficult for readers to access because of the sheer length and bulk of a large-print volume, the shelf space required by many braille volumes, or the tedium of listening to large numbers of recorded entries. Librarians assigning categories should exercise restraint and search for the one best placement—or two at most, if the book definitely and throughout (not just here and there) is representative of those categories.

Best placement needed

Although subject categories are reviewed several times before catalogs are published, the best time to make such a determination is at the beginning, when the annotator has the book in hand. Later determinations have to be made from the annotation, which we surely hope is accurate. It is, however, a secondary source and necessarily short, and

therefore using the annotation for this purpose is much less reliable than working from the book.

Things to consider

Some titles naturally overlap two or more subject categories. Most books of historical fiction are also either romances or adventure stories, and many contain elements of both. The person assigning the subject category must decide which of the possible placements—historical fiction, romance, or adventure—is the most descriptive of the book. Cooking, diet and nutrition, and medicine and health overlap, but the subject generally leans toward one of these categories, and one placement is sufficient for a reader to find the information.

More difficult are categories that are similar to each other but have a slightly different emphasis. Government and politics and U.S. history are obviously related. People interested in this material would be likely to look for books under both headings and would not be well served by finding many of the same books in both places. The annotator must determine whether the material is more related to governing and its political aspects or has substantial impact on history.

Where would a reader look?

Some subject categories are more precise subdivisions of a larger subject category, such as animals and wildlife, astronomy, and computers, all of which could also fall under science and technology. Books placed in specific subject categories should not also be listed under the more general one.

NLS practice is to place most biographies in the subject category for which the person is known, because readers interested in a sports figure are most likely to look in the subject category of sports, reader interested in a musician are most likely to look under the music heading, and readers interested in movie stars are most likely to try stage and screen. General memoirs and biographical writings about people not identified with a particular field are listed under

biography, and a note precedes this category explaining that other biographies can be found in the appropriate subject category.

Some books must have more than one category for various placements in the catalogs. These books usually appear in the main-entry section and also again under headings for different age groups or types of material. Both adult catalogs have lists for young adults following the main section and an index to bestsellers. *For Younger Readers* has separate lists of print/braille books and books for very young readers (generally preschool through grade 2), as well as the selected list for young adults mentioned above. These placements are indicated by assigning the heading as an additional subject category.

The general category in both the nonfiction and fiction sections is for books that do not fall into any of the designated subject categories. Therefore, books placed there should not have a second listing except for placement. Books can be general and bestsellers; they can be general and for young adults; they cannot be general and also belong to social sciences.

The short stories category is an exception to the rule about single placements as far as possible. Many NLS patrons prefer short material, almost regardless of the subject, probably because more than half of them are sixty-five years old or older and some are subject to the decreasing memory span that can be part of aging. Short stories, therefore, are always listed in their own category and also in another subject category if appropriate. Science fiction collections, for example, would always be listed in both places.

Dealing with different types of category records
Subject categories are entered into the production record when the book is annotated, along with a copy-allotment category for use by professionals in libraries for selecting the number of copies they will need. Assigning catalog

Formal cataloging rules are different

subject categories is a separate function from assigning copy-allotment categories and each has a different audience and purpose. Copy-allotment categories generally follow Dewey Decimal rules and can be different from the one or more NLS categories assigned for catalogs. The NLS Bibliographic Control Section may add more categories or use different ones for the official cataloging record retained in the *International Union Catalog* database.

Up to three categories can be used for catalogs, not because three are expected but for the rare occasions in which three are needed. An example would be a collection of occult short stories that becomes a bestseller. Juvenile fiction can fall under family, friends, and very young readers. Generally, however, one subject category is best and two will suffice for nearly all exceptions.

Reviewing catalog categories

Combination of titles actually produced may require restructuring categories

Categories are reviewed when the book is annotated and again when the book has been produced and initial records for catalogs are compiled. These initial records are done in conjunction with the preparation of the bimonthly editions of *Braille Book Review* and *Talking Book Topics,* which do not list books by subject. However, the computer record for each book, which is derived from the production record, does contain this information. Review at this point is mainly concerned with correcting errors and removing extra entries. The more significant review takes place when all issues of *Braille Book Review* and *Talking Book Topics* have been prepared for the calendar year or years covered by each catalog. At that point records for each issue are combined and sorted by catalog and category for a preliminary review of books actually produced and where they are placed. Catalogs that contain recorded books (either entirely or combined with braille books) generally list between 1,200 and 1,700 entries and can run to upwards of 500 print pages, making access by subject essential.

The reviewer has to use judgment to make sure that readers have subject categories that will provide the best access to information about books included in each particular catalog. When categories were assigned, the annotator was dealing with best placement for an individual book—without knowledge of what other books would be produced in a particular time period (production times vary for different types of material) and therefore appear in the same catalog. Only now do we deal with these books collectively. The basic categories are a starting point and are not immutable.

Most of the books will be listed under the subject categories initially assigned; mysteries, romances, and westerns do not tend to change genres, and there will surely be enough of them to fill several pages in each print catalog. Some of the nonfiction categories, such as sports and stage and screen are also quite static.

Categories may change

We try not to raise reader expectations by listing on the contents pages subject categories that contain only two or three books. Some categories, therefore, should be combined if there are only small numbers of books in one or both of them. Gardening books, for instance, can be included under either home management or hobbies. Inspirational books can be combined with religion. Gothics can be placed with suspense books, if there are not enough titles in that category in this particular catalog. Single entries that do not fit with any other category should be designated general.

More exciting is trying to discover categories that can be broken out from the basic category lists according to the actual entries for each catalog. The collective categories such as government and politics are prime candidates for separation. We have at times had enough books to list politics as a separate category, which means that readers more interested in the political aspects of government do not have to deal with the more legalistic aspects unless they choose to do so. We are now using family as a basic cate-

gory due to a renewed interest in this subject and therefore more books available for selection, but these books were for many years listed under marriage, family, and sex. And there have been times when the combined listing of marriage and family made more sense, with sex listed separately.

The general category should always be examined for books that fall into a subject not considered earlier. One year we discovered several books on amateur radio, an important interest and activity for some blind patrons. And sometimes scanning the entire list reveals a new and significant category. Nature and the environment, now on the basic list, emerged by combining several biographies, some titles listed under animals and wildlife, others listed under science, and some from social sciences.

The basic category list, which itself changes from time to time, represents what is realistic and probable when dealing with an individual book, and should reflect the annotator's best judgment for that book. But the preliminary list for each catalog is not static. Much review and judgment go into determining the best patron access to each particular group of entries.

Catalog subject headings

Adult catalogs

Nonfiction

ADVE	Adventure	True accounts of hazardous or exciting events, often in exotic settings
ANIM	Animals and Wildlife	Books on natural history, zoology, pet care, birding, and other wildlife activities
ARTS	Arts, The	Works on painting and artists, plus other works on the fine arts not included in specific subjects
ASTR	Astronomy	Works about space and the universe
BEST	Bestsellers	Books that appear on a major list of bestselling nonfiction for at least four weeks. Now used to compile a list, rather than as a separate category. Full entries appear in another subject category as appropriate.
BIOG	Biography	Biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, and accounts of specific events in an person's life. Use for individuals who do not fit into a specific subject.

BLIN	Blindness and Physical Handicaps	Personal accounts, handbooks and guidebooks, and legislation affecting blind or handicapped individuals; includes NLS catalogs
BUSI	Business and Economics	Books on business principles, successful business people or firms, and analyses of economic practices and trends
CARE	Career and Job Training	Books with general career advice and information on specific fields
CLAS	Classics	Classical works of nonfiction; includes landmark books in various disciplines
COMP	Computers	Books on the history of computer technology and basic principles of computer operation
CONS	Consumerism	Information for the informed buyer; includes money handling, insurance, estate planning, legal advice, and classes of products such as beauty aids or wholesome foods
COOK	Cooking	Cookbooks and books describing food for particular occasions or from various ethnic cultures
CRIM	Crime	Accounts of the planning and execution of a crime; the consequences of that crime to the perpetrator, victim, or community; workings of the judicial system

DIET	Diet and Nutrition	Books on food consumption and its relationship to health, including types of regimens for specific purposes and conditions
DRAM	Drama and Screen	Plays, lives of playwrights, and critical commentaries; reviews, interviews, history, and biographies of stars go under Stage and Screen
EDUC	Education	Guides for parents, personal accounts, and discussions of theory
FAMI	Family	Family concerns, child development, parenting, and elder care
FOLK	Folktales	Folktales, fairy tales, tall tales, and legends (will be printed in fiction section)
GARD	Gardening	Garden handbooks and guides
GENE	General	Books that do not readily fit elsewhere
GOVE	Government and Politics	Discussions and analyses of political policies and practices and government events; includes biographies of political figures, accounts of election campaigns, and effects of foreign policies
GRAD	Grade 1 braille	Books in uncontracted braille for adult learners
HOBB	Hobbies and Crafts	How-to books and personal accounts

HOME	Home Management	Housekeeping hints and maintenance guides
HUMO	Humor	Essays in a light vein
INSP	Inspiration	Meditations and prayers; commentaries on spiritual life; personal accounts of spiritual growth and dealing with crises
JOUR	Journalism and the Media	Career guides, reminiscences, and appraisals
LANG	Language and Linguistics	Usage manuals; histories of language development
LEGA	Legal Issues	Court cases, functions of the court system and the Supreme Court, and legal aspects of legislation
LITE	Literature	Literary works including speeches and letters; biographical works about authors; critical appraisals
MARR	Marriage and Sex	Books on love and relationships
MEDI	Medicine and Health	General guides to well-being; health care for parts of the body such as hair and skin; books on specific conditions and diseases; biographies of medical practitioners
MUSI	Music	Books about music and musicians, both popular and classical

NATU	Nature and the Environment	Books on natural sciences, ecology, conservation, and lives of people identified with natural history
OCCU	Occult and Astrology	Accounts of events beyond the known range of natural or physical science; includes astrology and UFO phenomena
PHIL	Philosophy	Introductions to philosophers and their thoughts; historical surveys; modern commentaries
POET	Poetry	Poetry collections and lives of poets
PSYC	Psychology and Self-Help	Discussions of behavior and its development, problem solving, and self-fulfillment
RELI	Religion	Religions of the world, historical developments, commentaries, and personal accounts
SCIE	Science and Technology	Biological and physical sciences; technological developments; lives of scientists. Do not use for books with a more precise category such as Nature or Astronomy.
SOCI	Social Sciences	Anthropology; social behavior and customs; social problems; etiquette
SPOR	Sports and Recreation	Books on specific sports, people in sports, and sportswriters; recreational activities primarily concerned with the outdoors

STAG	Stage and Screen	Collections of reviews and interviews; history of developments and trends; lives of stars. People primarily noted for stage or screen musicals are listed here; rock stars and opera singers go under music.
TRAV	Travel	Accounts of journeys, usually adventurous or leading to insights about people and places; travel guides and tips, including guides for disabled travelers
USHI	U.S. History	Accounts and analyses of events, eras, and cultures in the American past; lives of historical figures
WARS	War	Military histories, personal memoirs, and analyses of causes, leaders, and developments
WEST	West, the	Histories and true stories of the American West from frontier days to the present, including accounts of both settlers and Native Americans. Accounts of settling land east of the Mississippi go under U.S. History
WOME	Women's Concerns	Books on women's issues and women who have been standard bearers. Does not include all books featuring a woman, or even all books about a woman who has achieved a first in some field.

	WORL	World History	Accounts and analyses of events, eras, and cultures outside the U.S.; lives of historical figures
	YOUN	Young Adults—Nonfiction	For junior high or older readers; must have grade-level tagline in the body of the annotation
	y fren	French titles	
	y germ	German titles	
	y ital	Italian titles	
	y span	Spanish titles	
	Fiction		
	ADVE	Adventure	Stories about suspenseful, hazardous, exciting, or unusual events that generally happen outdooors and often include journeys; includes survival stories
	ANIM	Animals	Stories with animals as protagonists or largely about animals
	BEST	Bestsellers	Books that appear on a major list of bestselling fiction for at least four weeks. Now used to compile a list, rather than as a separate category. Full entries appear in another subject category as appropriate.
Adult fiction	CLAS	Classics	Classical works of a fictional nature

CONT	Contemporary	Works of an experimental nature or trendy content. Can contain general works characterized by much strong language, violence, or explicit descriptions of sex.
FAMI	Family	Fictional works that trace the history or development of families; can cover more than one generation or focus on current relationships
FANT	Fantasy	Whimsical stories involving imaginary or improbable situations or events, usually taking place on Earth or in an imaginary land rather than in outer space
GENE	General	Fictional works that cannot be readily classed elsewhere. Also used for works of more literary merit than genre fiction.
GOTH	Gothics	Stories of mystery and romance, usually in an eerie setting
GRAD	Grade 1 braille	Books in uncontracted braille for adult learners
GROW	Growing Up	Coming-of-age stories usually involving relationships
HIST	Historical	Fictional treatment of events or persons in history, or stories set in a particular era

HOLI	Holidays	Stories centering around a holiday theme
HUMA	Human Relationships	Works about dysfunctional families, non-traditional choices, and other bondings
HUMO	Humor	Fictional works of a humorous nature, generally light in tone
LEGA	Legal Themes	Stories about lawyers, law firms, and court cases
LITE	Literature	Books of lasting value or literary worth, but not considered classics; can include recent prize winners
MEDI	Medical Themes	Stories about doctors and nurses, hospitals, and illnesses
MYST	Mystery and Detective	Works about police, private investigators, or civilians who redress offenses against the law or cleverly solve baffling puzzles; includes crime stories
OCCU	Occult and Horror	Fictional works on supernatural phenomena, the occult, ghosts, and extrasensory perception; includes horror tales
POLI	Political Themes	Works that deal with politicians, cians, the workings of political parties, or the affairs of government
PSYC	Psychological Themes	Stories where much of the action takes place within the mind of the character, often distinguished by internal dialogue and a distortion of reality

RELI	Religious Themes	Stories of a religious or inspirational nature; includes Bible stories
ROMA	Romance	Uncomplicated, sentimental, or emotional aspects of romantic love presented in a simple plot and usually ending happily; generally light, but may include descriptions of sex
SCIE	Science Fiction	Stories about life in the future or in outer space
SHOR	Short Stories	Short fiction of all kinds
SPOR	Sports	Fictional accounts of sports, sporting events, or people involved in sports
SPIE	Spies and Espionage	Fiction involving plots against political figures, governments, or large organizations
SUSP	Suspense	Fiction usually involving some type of rescue or resolution of Fiction involving plots against a dangerous situation
WARS	War Stories	Fictional accounts of the exploits of soldiers or events of wartime
WEST	Westerns	Stories set in the American West
YOUN	Young Adults—Fiction	For junior high or older readers; must have grade-level tagline in the body of the annotation

y fren	French titles	
y germ	German titles	
y ital	Italian titles	
y poli	Polish titles	
y port	Portuguese titles	
y span	Spanish titles	

Children's catalogs

Note: Juvenile categories are similar to those for adults. Explanations are given only when a category is not used for adult titles or when the contents differ.

Nonfiction

ADVE	Adventure	Works about adventurous people, present and past
ANIM	Animals	
ASTR	Astronomy	Space, the sky, and the stars
BIOG	Biography	Lives of famous people
BLIN	Blindness and Physical Handicaps	
CARE	Careers	
CLAS	Classics	Use only for books that have endured; do not use for retellings of familiar stories
COMP	Computers	
COOK	Cooking	
FOLK	Folk and Fairy Tales	Will be placed in fiction when printed because children

		would look there for stories about things that are not real
GENE	General	
GEOG	Geography	Books on places in the world and the people who live in them
GOVE	Government and the Law	
HIST	History	
HOBB	Hobbies and Crafts	Books about fun things to do
HOLI	Holidays	Books on the meaning and origin of holidays worldwide and how they are celebrated
JOKE	Jokes, Riddles, and Rhymes	Collections that use language to evoke fun and laughter
LANG	Language	Books about grammar, usage, and fun aspects of words
MEDI	Medicine and Health	
MUSI	Music	
NATU	Nature	Books on natural history and wonders of the world around us; can include environmental issues
POET	Poetry, Drama, and Literature	
RELI	Religion and Ethics	
SCIE	Science	

SPOR	Sports and Recreation	
VERP (PRINT/ BRAILLE)	Nonfiction books, usually for young children, that combine the original print and clear braille overlays; used to create a separate catalog section for these books	
VERY	Very Young Readers	Books for preschool through grade 2; does not include PRINT/BRAILLE
YOUA	You and Your Body	Explanations of how the body works, health care, and problems of addictions and substance abuse
y span	Spanish titles	

Fiction

ADVE	Adventure	
ANIM	Animals	
CLAS	Classics	Use only for books that have endured; do not use for retellings of familiar stories
FAMI	Family	Stories about relationships with siblings and adult family members
FANT	Fantasy	Tales of other lands and worlds, strange beings, magic, and wishes-come-true; includes tales of witches and ghost stories
FRIE	Friendship	Stories of forming and maintaining bonds—with schoolmates, neighbors of all ages, pets, and even favorite toys

GENE	General	
GROW	Growing-up	Stories focusing on an experience that promotes understanding and growth
HIST	Historical Fiction	
HOLI	Holidays	Stories about celebratrations of all kinds, from birthdays to major religious or ethnic festivals
HUMO	Humor	
MYST	Mystery	
RELI	Religious Themes	Books that revolve around biblical stories or religious practices
SCAR	Scary Stories	Works designed to provide a mild thrill, often with a fantasy theme
SCIE	Science Fiction	
SCHO	School	Stories that take place primarily in the classroom or revolve around school activities
SHOR	Short Stories	
SPOR	Sports	
TALL	Tall Tales	Stories of legendary heroes and extraordinary feats or events

VERP PRINT/ BRAILLE	Fiction books, usually for young children, that combine the original print and clear braille overlays; used to create a separate catalog section for these books	
VERY	Very Young Readers	Books for preschool through grade 2, not including PRINT/BRAILLE
WEST	Westerns	
y span	Spanish titles	

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