The second part of the annotation paragraph is your assessment or evaluation of the article according to a straightforward and universally accepted set of criteria. Our source evaluation matrix has seven categories including authorship, publisher, currency, references, writing, reasoning, and relevance.

Each category has four rating boxes organized with the stronger qualities on the left and moving to the weaker qualities on the right. Place a check mark in the box that best fits your evaluation of the article for each category. It is okay if you feel an article is between two of the choices. Your selections will serve as guides when you write the assessment part of the annotation paragraph.

Authorship: The person reading your annotation will want to know whether the authors are experts or otherwise qualified to write on the topic of the article. It is also important to identify cases where the authors cannot be verified as experts or cannot be identified at all. Academic articles and books tend to identify when the author is affiliated with a university or college.

Publisher: Academic articles and books usually come from publishers that are well-known and respected within the academic community. Trade journals contain articles written by experts in a field, but the articles are designed for audiences such as professionals in a trade or practice. Some articles may be published by either a lower quality publisher or by a totally unknown publisher.

Currency: Currency focuses on how recent or new the information is. Some disciplines change so rapidly that an article published more than a year ago is considered out of date. This matrix applies to the social sciences where a source is considered recent if it was published within the past 3-5 years. As indicated in the matrix, an article may be 10 years old or older but reports on a classic study or theory that is still used today. Areas for concern include articles that are more than 10 years old
and do not support your research needs because the information is out of date, or where there is no known date of publication.

References: Does the author of the article cite the sources being used? If sources are provided, are they from scholarly sources, non-scholarly sources, or a mixture? Having complete citations allows the reader to access the sources cited for the research. The weakest scholarly or academic articles use few sources of any kind or have no sources at all.

Writing: Academic articles are written by scholars for other scholars, whereas trade journals are written for a specialized professional audience. Regardless of the intended audience, is the writing understandable and accessible? Is the writing difficult to understand because it uses specialized language or jargon whose meaning is difficult to decode? Is the writing so vague that only the most general ideas are conveyed? Finally, is the writing unclear due to confusing sentence structure, poor word choices, or grammatical errors?

Reasoning: What is the overall quality of the reasoning being used in supporting the claim being made or tested? Is evidence presented that clearly supports the claim, and are opposing claims recognized? Evidence may be provided, but is it weak or are opposing claims ignored? Is the quality of the reasoning suspect because little evidence is provided or fallacious (“bad”) reasoning is used? If the source fails to present any evidence at all, it is relying upon opinions or unsupported reasoning and is thus problematic.

Relevance: This category applies specifically to your research topic. Does the article directly support your topic and is therefore useful as a source, or does the article contain information that is helpful but mostly as background information? You might find the article has some information but is not very useful or the article has information that is irrelevant for your needs.
Once you have rated the article in each category, you are ready to write the assessment portion of the annotation paragraph. Choose three or four of the categories to write about, focusing on where the article is strongest and weakest. Express your evaluation of the selected categories in well-written yet concise sentences

Reflection: The final part of your annotation paragraph is your judgment as to the usefulness of the article for anyone doing research for a project similar to yours. For instance, if you were researching in order to prepare a speech on nonverbal communication and you had this article as a source, how valuable is it for your project? Tell your reader in a sentence or two whether they would find this article useful or not for their specific project, and why.

The annotation is finished once you have the complete citation followed by a single paragraph containing your summary, your assessment, and your reflection.