

## What is a bibliographic essay?

The simplest definition I can think of for a bibliographic essay is this: a bibliographic essay introduces readers to a topic, and evaluates resources related to that topic. A good bibliographic essay is not a discussion of a topic as much as it is an introduction to the best resources available that discuss a topic. That distinction may be subtle, but is absolutely critical.

### What does a BE look like?

Good bibliographic essays follow a relatively straightforward pattern.

- **Introduction.** BEs often include an introduction that accomplishes the following two goals: (a) identify the focal topic of the BE; and (b) introduce the structure of the BE, including the broad categories into which the resource discussion is divided.
- **Topic Discussion.** The second section of a good BE discusses the focal topic in a bit more detail. This discussion often accomplishes the following # goals: (a) explain the significance of the topic for readers; (b) identify the most important perspectives, people, or organizations involved in the conversation about the topic; or (b) identify the most important categories into which conversations about the topic are divided. (I assume that is confusing; see Example 1 and 2 below.)

**Example 1: BE about No Child Left Behind.** A bibliographic essay about a politically divisive topic such as federal school administration and funding will briefly and fairly characterize the principle participants and their positions. In the case of NCLB, you might characterize the President's position, that of the National Education Administration, that of school administrators at the building level.

**Example 2: BE about Home Wireless Networking.** A bibliographic essay about wireless networking might simply explain briefly what it is, what are generally characterized as the main advantages of setting up a home wireless network, and then introduce the categories for the discussion.

- **Resource Discussions.** The bulk of a BE is made up of discussions of the resources you as the author would recommend that readers seek out for further reading. The key is to make clear what you find useful about the resources, or what you think others will find useful about the resources. The best way to do that is to categorize the resources in some way and then discuss their individual merits. The most important thing to accomplish in this section is to help readers know where they can go to get information, and how they will be able to use the information they find. Again, see the examples below.

#### **Example 1: BE about No Child Left Behind.**

Continuing this example, you might choose to divide your resources according to which position each represents. That would be logical, but perhaps not the most helpful. It might be more helpful to develop different, descriptive categories for organizing this part of the discussion.

- Government policies.
- Articles supporting NCLB.
- Articles not supporting NCLB.
- Articles describing local action regarding and impact of NCLB.

#### **Example 2: BE about Home Wireless Networking.**

Here you might decide to organize your discussion of resources by the questions homeowners are most likely to have regarding the technology.

- What do I look for when buying equipment for my wireless network?
- What devices can I connect with a wireless network?
- How do I set up a wireless network?
- How do I make sure my wireless network is secure from outsiders?