Academic Writing Guide – Stage 2, Part 1

Adam talking about the annotated bibliography

Sue: So now tell me about the specifics of putting together that annotated bibliography once you'd found those sources. How did you find that?

Adam: Yeah. So what I would do is if I had a book say, for example, I would kind of go through each of the chapters, just have a brief look at the titles and make sure that I was going to a part within the book that was going to be relevant to what I wanted to discuss. Obviously, I couldn't read through the entire book so I had to be quite specific with that. And then it was just a case of kind of scanning quickly, reading through parts of the book to see if there were any particular dates, any particular sort of words or kind of things that kind of jumped out that seemed related to what I was looking into. And then I would kind of spend a little bit more time reading that section or going over that part.

Sue: And did you rely mostly on books? Or did you have articles, online sources? What did you have in the bibliography?

Adam: I had a couple of articles. Most of the sources were books. I don't know why it ended up like that. That was just the way that it ended up. I think it was just there was a lot more information it felt within the books. The articles were really good for covering off maybe reviews of a film or something like that. So looking at what people were saying maybe about the film, reviewing it, critiquing it or something like that. But in terms of historical context I found that going to books was a lot better.

Sue: So in a sense you were doing two things in tandem, weren't you? You were finding the historical context material, and then you were finding that critique and that argument that would accompany it. So when you're dealing with a whole book how easy is it to know which part will help you?

Adam: I mean with the title that we were given, you know we were specifically looking at Cold War, Britain, 1960s. It became very easy to sort of take out a book from the library about the Cold War, just quickly look through and find the bit that maybe was related to Britain or that period of time (the 1960s) or paranoia, so you could instantly kind of cut out a load of chapters and jump straight to the bits that you wanted.

Sue: So really you're linking this work with that earlier work that you did where you analyzed your title aren't you? So everything's sort of linking forward isn't it? Good. So thinking about the annotated bibliography once you've moved on now to thinking more about writing up a draft, how helpful, or not helpful, will that be?

Adam: Well I've just started writing my draft, and the annotated bibliography has been one of the most helpful things. I feel, as some parts of my essay are pretty much already written for me – you know I've found sort of different phrases or different sort of quotes that I'm going to take. I found specific experiences or incidents, and those are already adding to the word count of my essay.

Sue: So that evidence feels quite solid? So that when you make a point in your essay you feel that you can immediately draw on relevant evidence?

Adam: Exactly. And the structuring that was done in in the first stage of the OAWG, along with that annotated bibliography, has meant that I now know which bits can kind of go into which section. It makes it a lot easier to kind of piece that puzzle together.

Sue: So far have you been able to keep drawing/have you been able to keep linking together the various tasks that you've been involved in up to this point? Has it made some kind of logic? Some kind of sense to you?

Adam: Yeah. At times it maybe didn't seem like it was all connected, but as I've gone on, as long as I've worked through each step on the OAWG and looked carefully at the instructions and what's being asked it does all kind of build together and connect in the end. You don't always see the bigger picture at the beginning but once you get towards the end, and you have all the bits and start piecing it together then it makes a lot more sense.