



# Annotating a Text

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**Why do we annotate?** Annotation makes the text your own; but more importantly, it provides you with a map of your experience that allows you to trace your route back through the text. If you think of a text as unknown territory that you're required to explore, map, and report back on, the annotations provide you with a kind of travel diary and map of the text. Once you have fully annotated a text, you will always be able to return to that text and pull out the material you need to make a point. Annotation makes the unknown known, and lets you assimilate, and later write on, the material in the book more easily.

That is why annotating a text, or marking the page with notes, is an excellent, if not essential, way to make the most out of the reading you do for college courses. Annotations make it easy to find important information quickly when you look back and review a text. They help you familiarize yourself with both the content and organization of what you read. They provide a way to begin engaging ideas and issues directly through comments, questions, associations, or other reactions that occur to you as you read. In all these ways, annotating a text makes the reading process an active one, not just background for writing assignments, but an integral first step in the writing process.

## **A well-annotated text will accomplish all of the following:**

- ✓ clearly identify where in the text important ideas and information are located
- ✓ express the main ideas of a text
- ✓ trace the development of ideas/arguments throughout a text
- ✓ introduce a few of the reader's thoughts and reactions

Ideally, you should read a text through once before making major annotations. You may want to circle unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts. This way, you will have a clearer idea about where major ideas and important information are in the text, and your annotating will be more efficient. Here are a few guidelines to get you started:

## **Highlight/Underline Key Phrases or Ideas:**

- ② Use underlining/highlighting sparingly; underlining/highlighting everything tends to make the notes useless, but systematic underlining/highlighting of key phrases and ideas helps them to stand out when you want to find them.
- ② Labeling or briefly explaining why you underlined/highlighted certain passages in the book margins will allow you to remember why you thought the passage was important and/or find key information more easily.
- ② Instead of underlining whole long passages, use brackets to mark off large segments that you feel are important. Label the passages you bracket with words that will help you understand why you bracketed them; for this purpose short phrases or single words are best.

## **Paraphrase/Summarize Passages:**

- ② Practice summarizing/paraphrasing the claim/thesis, supporting points, and significant ideas in the book margins next to the passage where they are located. This will make it easier to locate these items when you have to go back to write a paper or discuss the text in class.
- ② Practice writing short summaries in the margins at the end of paragraphs/pages/chapters/sub-sections. This will help you determine if you understand the text and prevent you from dozing off or falling asleep
- ② Consider developing a system of easily drawn symbols (ex: asterisks, stars, eyes, daggers, exclamation points, circles) that you can use to label major recurring themes, the thesis/claim, supporting points, etc.. I suggest using a different symbol for each one.

## **Comment/Respond to the Text:**

- ② Note your reactions—agreement/disagreement, questions, related personal experience, connections to ideas from others texts, class discussions, etc.. This is an excellent way to begin formulating your own ideas for a paper or assignment. It is also VERY helpful when you are discussing a text in class or when you have to go back a re-read a text for whatever reason.