

How to Read: Annotation

Reading is an active engagement with a text; annotation enacts that engagement, putting you in touch with the text as you put your pencil to its page. Annotation will make you a better reader and is crucial to success in this class. Your annotations will yield two major benefits:

First, annotation gives you footholds for understanding a text *in detail*. By pausing to find and mark the thesis, follow keyterms, and look up words you don't know, you make sure you understand the author's argument. By paraphrasing and questioning in the margin, you note important landmarks in that argument. Moreover, when you bring your annotated text to class, you'll have an easy reference to both the author's ideas and your own, which will greatly aid your participation in discussions.

Second, annotation provides an immediate and direct response. Your understanding and your confusion, your agreement and your quarrels are placed *next to* or *on top of* the portions of the text that engendered these responses. If you have also effectively marked the thesis, keyterms, and structure of the essay, your annotations will allow you to quickly return to a text, recall its argument *and* bring to mind your thoughts about it.

If you find yourself unable to recall what you have read last night, annotation is the solution.

And since careful reading will inspire ideas for your essays, annotation is where writing begins.

The Process of Annotation:

You will invent your own style of annotation, but these are some common modes. Follow this process with everything you read:

1. **Read with a pen in your hand**—annotation is immediate response, even though it also occurs in layers: a second reading will bring up different responses than your first
2. **Mark the text**—
 - ✱ circle keyterms
 - ✱ underline important ideas and remarkable phrasing
 - ✱ connect related ideas *with lines drawn to literally connect them*
 - ✱ use shorthand symbols (!!! for excitement, ??? for confusion, << for a turn in the argument)[Resist the urge to apply a highlighter to large sections of text. If an entire paragraph is important, mark it with brackets or a double line in the margin. Expansive highlighting blurs all the text in to single pink-hued block such that you lose sight of the specific evidence and the individual terms.]
3. **Write in the margin**—
 - ✱ paraphrase the topic idea of a paragraph
 - ✱ question the author's claims
 - ✱ affirm the author's claims
 - ✱ note your confusion
 - ✱ define unfamiliar words (yes, write the definition down for later reference)
4. **Pause at the end**— Use the space at the end of a text to pause and write a few sentences:
 - ✱ What is the argument? Paraphrase the claims of the piece.
 - ✱ What are your overall thoughts about this piece? What questions stick in your mind?