Annotating

# What is Annotating?

Annotating means taking notes on/in a reading. Unlike notes in a notebook or in a Word processing document, annotations directly connect what you’ve read to what you’re trying to remember about the reading. When we annotate in our text, we actually end up writing less because we’re making notes in the text we’re referencing.

Like most study strategies, annotation is individualized, but there are some common things that many good college students do when they annotate their texts. Use the tips below to help you develop your own annotation style. You’ll have lots of opportunities to annotate throughout your college career, so you want to take the time to create a system that works well for you.

# What Should I Annotate?

**Before you begin, answer the following questions:**

*Why am I reading this in the first place?* (Set your purpose!)

*What am I going to do with this reading when I’m done?* (Set your goal!)

**Let’s Get Started!**

We add five types of annotations to our reading of college texts:

* Unknown Vocabulary: Circle unknown vocabulary words when you come across them in the text. Then underline surrounding text that helps you understand the meaning of the word, or write a short definition in the margin
  + Define any unfamiliar vocabulary the author uses:
    - Part of Speech: Can you determine the unknown word’s part of speech? (e.g., is the unknown word a thing/idea/person, action, or describing word (does it describe a thing or an action?)
    - Word Parts: Can you break down the word into parts that have meaning you can understand?
      * Prefix: the first part of the word that changes the meaning of the word (e.g., *re*- in rethink)
      * Root: the part of the word that contains its meaning (e.g., re*think*)
      * Suffix: the ending part of the word that conveys the word’s part of speech (e.g., -*ing* in rethink*ing*)
    - Context Clues: Can you look at the sentence(s) around this word to understand the meaning of this word?
  + Make the vocabulary “yours” by reworking the sentence in your own language in the annotation.
  + Was there a rhetorical purpose for the vocabulary-tone, ethos, pathos, or logos?
  + Was the vocabulary choice effective? If you were revising this what would you change in the vocabulary.
* Important Ideas: Draw a line down the side of the page to mark an important idea or passage. Then write a short phrase to help you remember that idea. Important ideas can include an author’s main argument, their reason for writing, or your reason for reading
  + What does this text make you think about? How does it make you feel?
  + What is the author’s main point?
  + What examples is the author using to illustrate the point?
  + What is the “So what” factor? Why does what the author wrote matter?
* Connections: When we read for academic purposes, we are making connections between the text and other texts, the text and ourselves, or the text and our world. Star or otherwise mark places in the text where you see a connection. Then write a short phrase in the margin explaining that connection
  + Make connections between this text to your own lived experience. Remember “schema” and “background knowledge”: is this text about something that you understand or is it outside of your experience? Write down the questions you have about the issue.
  + What is a way to get “background knowledge” if you are unfamiliar with the text/subject?
  + Make connections between this passage and another text that you have read in this class.
  + Go beyond the text and look at how the issue presented impacts the world around you. Start small: look into how the issue impacts your hometown. Then look bigger, how does the issue impact your culture? Go bigger, how does the issue impact your country? Your world?
* Knowledge: Use your metacognitive skills to think about your learning
  + What do you know about the issue presented in the text now that you have read it, examined the vocabulary, clarified the main point, made connections to yourself, other texts, and your world, that you did not know before?
  + Think through all the knowledge you have gained. For instance: What did you learn about the author? The subject? New vocabulary? New concepts? What connections did you make? How did the text make you feel? What things do you want to know more about? What questions do you have?
  + Consider your newfound knowledge as you write your summary
* Summary: The last thing that we annotate while reading is a short summary after we’ve finished the text. Write a short note at the top of your article to remember what you thought was important about a reading. You can make connections between the text and class lectures or write down the main ideas from the text. Experiment with writing different short summaries! No matter what you write, your summary should be no more than 2-3 sentences.

# Final Tips

* Less is Best: Many students read with their pens/highlighters in hand. Out of habit, they underline/highlight everything they read. The point of annotating is to emphasize the most important points. If you find yourself highlighting entire paragraphs, put your writing utensil down until you’ve finished a page. Then go back and ask yourself if there is anything in that page that you need to annotate.
* Experiment with Technology: Annotating isn’t limited to paper-and-pencil reading. You can annotate through several apps. In Canvas, there is a demonstration of how to annotate in Adobe Acrobat, but there are several different programs that you can use.