

# *Reading the Write Way: A Guide for Annotating Your Reading Assignments*



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## *What is annotation?*

- Annotation is the act of adding notes to a text. A student sums up the information of a text by writing brief key points in the margins. Annotation will help you preview a text, take layers of notes from the text, and formulate questions from your notes.
- Annotation is an active reading strategy that improves comprehension and is also a technique that requires you to take time to understand what you're reading and then put it into your own words.

## *Why should I annotate?*

- Research shows that annotation...
  - has a **profound** effect on comprehension and retention.<sup>1</sup>
  - cuts down on your study time! Students who do not annotate spend **77% more time** studying than students who do annotate.<sup>2</sup>
  - can affect your test scores! Students who annotate perform better on tests with less preparation time.

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson, M.L. and Nist, S.L. (1990). Textbook annotation: An effective and efficient study strategy for college students. *Journal of Reading*, 34(2), 122-129.

<sup>2</sup> Strode, Susan L. (1992). Teaching annotation writing to college students. *Forum for Reading*, 23(1-2), 33-44.

# How do I annotate?

## 1. Preview

*This preliminary look at the text is meant to prepare you for close reading.*

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- a) Get an idea of what the text is about. If you're about to read a novel, look at the back of the book for a quick summary. If you're about to read a chapter in a Chemistry textbook, look for a review section at the beginning or end of the chapter.
- b) Look at captions, headings and subheadings, names, boldfaced terms, and/or visual devices such as charts, graphs, pictures, or diagrams.
- c) Note the organization of the text—is the text divided into chapters or sections? How many pages do you need to read?
- d) Think about the author's message, motivation, and intended audience.

## 2. Read with a pen, pencil, and/or post-it note in hand

*This close reading is meant to help you identify, remember, and recall essential information.*

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- a) Sum up important ideas in *your own words*.
- b) Add your own examples.
- c) Keep a dictionary handy and look up confusing or unknown words as you read.
- d) Put a question mark next to passages or problems you don't understand.
- e) Write down questions to bring up during class discussion or to ask your professor after class.
- f) Make a note of passages that generate a strong positive or negative response.
- g) Mark repetitions.
- h) Note relationships, themes, symbols, and/or images that are recurrent.
- i) Circle, highlight, or underline important keywords, terms, and/or definitions.
- j) Mark anything that you think is important, interesting, or inconsistent.

## 3. Remember:

- a) Annotations are brief. Keep it short.
- b) Annotations should be about information *you* think is important.



When you write in your own words, summarize ideas and examples, pose questions, and think about difficult material, you receive immediate feedback about whether or not you understand the information. Annotation is an active learning technique that gives you instant feedback and helps you monitor your progress.

## Helpful Annotating Strategies

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*Questions to ask yourself when annotating a text:*

- What are the major points of the reading? i.e. names, dates, ideas, terminology, and/or events, and etc.
- What is the author saying? What is the idea or point that the author is trying to get across?
- What question(s) is the author trying to answer with the text?
- How do I feel about what the text is saying? Do I agree or disagree, or am I somewhere in the middle?
- What does the text mean? Why are the events in the text important? Do I understand what I'm reading?
- How do my personal experiences, views, and feelings stack up against the thesis or main idea of the selection?
- How do my personal experiences and/or perceptions affect my opinion of the text?

## General Reading Tips

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1. *Pick an appropriate place with few distractions to do your reading.*
2. *Prepare yourself! Look over any notes you took on previous chapters or skim through what you have already read to refresh your memory.*
3. *Be an active reader—Engage as many of your senses as possible (write, read out loud, talk about the text with a friend, look at visual aids or create your own).*

## Application

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*Think of a reading assignment that you have to complete this semester. Ask yourself:*

- What is the purpose of the assignment?
- What annotating techniques could you use while you're reading?
- What questions should you ask yourself while reading this assignment?
- Which active reading strategies could you use with this assignment?
- How will the strategies you use for this assignment differ from the strategies you use with other reading assignments you complete this semester?

