



Annotating Texts

Annotating is defined as the act of adding notes to a text, diagramming a source, or giving explanations or commentary. To become an “active reader,” students must read with a pen in hand and write down critical information for future reference. The purpose of annotation is to help readers pick out the most important material, understand a deeper meaning of the text, increase concentration, find the main ideas, understand the conversation around a topic, and retain information. Below are some tips to help you annotate well.

What Should I Look For?

Since annotation is used mainly to grasp a better understanding of the text, it is important to annotate several aspects of the text which can be then be revisited. When reading, look for and mark: unclear information, questions about the material, repeated ideas, unfamiliar words or terms, research or data, important quotes, connections to other sources or texts, contradictions, details that have dual meanings, connections to other subjects, themes, etc.

How do I Annotate?

- Make notes in the margins about how the text connects to class topics or themes
- Put a star (*) next to the main idea
- Put a question mark (?) near material that is unclear or confusing
- Make lists of ideas that coorelate together using 1, 2, 3
- Use exclamation points (!) for ideas you disagree with and include an explanation
- Put a box around important names and dates
- Underline themes, trends, or major topics of interest.
- Circle unknown or jargon words
- Highlight important phrases or theories you might use as quotes in a paper
- Put parenthesis () around repeated words or phrases
- Make notes about how a source or text relates to others you have read
- Include a 1-2 sentence summary at the end of every chapter or section

Humanities Annotation Topics to Look For:

- Literary Elements – Plot, Characters, Setting, Genre, Etc.
- Diction, syntax, sentence structure, and other language elements
- Recurring motifs or symbols, possible themes, and universal truths
- Literary Devices, such as metaphors, similes, and imagery
- Roles of the narrator and reader of a text
- Specific quotes or passages meant for close reading
- Questions, contradictions, counterarguments, or confusion

STEM Annotation Topics to Look For:

- Dates, Authors, Date of Publication
- Theories, discoveries, the date of the discovery, etc.
- Data, including figures, charts, graphs, and tables
- Repeated Information (Usually if material is mentioned more than once, it is especially significant.)
- New and unfamiliar concepts, terms, phrases, or ideas and ways in which they can be applied to something outside of the course
- Any bias from the narrator that is evident in the text

Some Important Things to Remember While Annotating

- The information you write down should be specific to *you*. There is no set format for annotations. Think about your own confusions, questions, and ideas.
- Often times (especially in poetry) it is useful to read the text first, sometimes more than once, before going back and annotating it.
- Do not underline, highlight, etc. everything. While it is necessary to mark essential information, commenting on everything will make it more difficult to look back and see what information was the most important.
- Do not feel rushed. Trying to speed through the annotations will result in not getting the most out of the text, and hurrying will only make it easier to miss important information and many of the subtle details the text has to offer.
- Remember that your annotations can either summarize or *add* something to the content of the text.
- Make note of moments in the text that jump out at you. Where did you react to the text? What are the most important parts?