

How to Annotate Text

Annotation is a method of commenting on, taking notes about, or explaining a text. To annotate a text well, do the following:

1. **Read the text twice**, once for a general understanding and a second time for a detailed understanding of the content.
2. **Use a pencil.** Your teacher may also allow you to use a highlighter. If so, you must make a written comment for any passage you highlight. Never underline or highlight many consecutive lines. Ask yourself, why is it important? Is it necessary?
3. **Number the text's paragraphs.** Paragraph numbers act as a reference so you can easily refer to a specific section of the text.
4. During the second reading, **mark the text to record what you are thinking.** Here are some symbols to use when annotating.



A circle indicates a word or phrase you do not understand.



A question mark indicates something you do not understand.



A star indicates information you think is important.



Underlining also indicates information that you think is important. You may, for example, underline a topic sentence or other key point.



An exclamation point indicates information you find *surprising* or *interesting*.

*I don't think
this is a wise
or fair decision.*

A written comment indicates your thoughts on the text. Written comments are the best form of annotation because they reflect your specific reactions to the text. Some reasons you may write a comment are to agree or disagree with a point, to predict, to connect ideas, or to remember an idea.*

The most common complaint about annotation is that it slows down your reading. Yes, it does. That's the point! If you read slowly you gain greater comprehension and understanding of the text!

* If you do not like writing in books, just use some post-its. That way the text stays clean.

Annotating a Text

1. **Pick up** a pencil, a pen, a highlighter, or a post-it.
2. **Read everything at least twice.**

The **first time**, read quickly to get a sense of what the text is about.

The **second** and **subsequent** times read carefully.

Mark anything that you think is:

- A. confusing,
- B. interesting
- C. surprising, or
- D. important.

Mark anything that is **unfamiliar** using symbols and keep going.

3. **Begin to annotate.**

- a. Circle, underline, or stick on a post-it for important ideas and explain their significance.
- b. Mark repetitions or rhetorical signals.
- c. Circle confusing words or phrases. Define from context or dictionary if possible.
- d. Note passages that seem inconsistent.
- e. Note passages that generate a strong positive or negative response.

4. **Write questions where you made annotations.** These questions can be for the instructor to answer, for the class to discuss, for you to use in future writing assignments, or for you to keep as a reminder of what you were thinking.

5. **Think about the connections** between this text and other texts you have read, information from other classes, and personal experiences.