HUNTER COLLEGE READING/WRITING CENTER
THE WRITING PROCESS
Invention: Annotating a Text

Annotating a text, or marking the pages with notes, is an excellent, if not essential, way to make the most out of the reading you do for college courses. Annotations make it easy to find important information quickly when you look back and review a text. They help you familiarize yourself with both the content and organization of what you read. They provide a way to begin engaging ideas and issues directly through comments, questions, associations, or other reactions that occur to you as you read. In all these ways, annotating a text makes the reading process an active one, not just background for writing assignments, but an integral first step in the writing process.

A well-annotated text will accomplish all of the following:
- clearly identify where in the text important ideas and information are located
- express the main ideas of a text
- trace the development of ideas/arguments throughout a text
- introduce a few of the reader's thoughts and reactions

Ideally, you should read a text through once before making major annotations. You may just want to circle unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts. This way, you will have a clearer idea about where major ideas and important information are in the text, and your annotating will be more efficient.

4 ways to Annotate a text:

1. **Highlighting/Underlining**
   Highlighting or underlining key words and phrases or major ideas is the most common form of annotating texts. However, over-reliance on highlighting is unwise for two reasons. First, there is a tendency to highlight more information than necessary, especially when done on a first reading. Second, highlighting is the least active form of annotating.

2. **Paraphrase/Summary of Main Ideas**
   Going beyond locating important ideas to being able to capture their meaning through paraphrase is a way of solidifying your understanding of these ideas. It's also excellent preparation for any writing you may have to do based on your reading. A series of brief notes in the margins beside important ideas gives you a handy summary right on the pages of the text itself.

3. **Descriptive Outline**
   A descriptive outline shows the organization of a piece of writing, breaking it down to show where ideas are introduced, where they are developed, and where any turns in the development occur. These functions might include any of the following:
   - Summarizing a topic/argument
   - Introducing an idea
   - Adding explanation
   - Considering an opposing view
   - Dismissing a contrary view
   - Stating a conclusion

4. **Comments/Responses**
   You can use annotation to go beyond understanding a text's meaning and organization by noting your reactions–agreement/disagreement, questions, related personal experience, connection to ideas from other texts, class discussions, etc.

Annotation Guidelines

1. **<u>READ</u>**
   a. The first thing you must ALWAYS do is read the information given.
   b. Read it with no pen/pencil/highlighter in your hand. Just READ.
2. **Circle** <u>key words</u> or <u>phrases</u> that are confusing or unknown to you.
   a. Replace the word with a word that is more familiar to you so that next time you read it, it will be more clear.
3. **<u>Underline</u>** or **<u>Highlight</u>** the major points in a single color.
   a. Each time you annotate your article you will use a different color.
   b. EVERYTHING is not important.
   c. Highlight what you would use if you were asked to do a summary on the information given.
4. **Ask questions.**
   a. Use a questions mark **?** for questions that you have during the reading.
   b. Write your question on the side somewhere so that you remember to ask the instructor.
5. **Use an exclamation point <u>!</u> for things that surprise you.**
   a. Briefly note what it was that caught your attention.
   b. Write it down in the margins or in a blank space.
6. **Draw an arrow <u>→</u> when you make a connection to something** inside the text to an idea or experience outside the text.
   a. Briefly note your connections in the margins or in a blank space.
7. **Write <u>EX</u> when the author provides an example.**
8. **Number arguments, important ideas, or key details, and write words or phrases that restate them.**
   a. This is to help you write a summary and/or use evidence from the article/information to support your stance.