INTEGRATED SKILLS

ANNOTATING

WHY IT'S USEFUL Annotating a text can help you to identify and remember key points in a reading, make connections between course readings and lectures, and note information you may wish to reference in exams or writing assignments.

You will likely be asked to read a lot of texts for your classes. The amount—and often the density—of reading material can be challenging, and a crucial part of the academic experience is being able to understand and synthesize the information you read as efficiently as possible. Annotating is one way to help you do this.

Annotating means marking key information in a text. It is an active reading strategy that can help you to understand and recall reading content more deeply. It can also help you make connections between readings, classroom discussions, and writing assignments. Annotating can take two forms: in-text markings and margin notes. (If you are reading an e-book, try using reader software that includes an annotation function.)

- *In-text marking* is underlining, circling, highlighting, and inserting asterisks, numbers, arrows, or other marks to make important information stand out and to show connections between key points. It is useful to work out your own annotation system and use it as consistently as possible. For

> **TIP**
>
> Be careful about highlighting! Highlighting is a useful annotating strategy, but it loses its effectiveness if you overuse it. If you cover a page with a sea of yellow highlighting, you have no way of determining what is most important when you review your notes later. In general, try to reserve highlighting for only the most important words, ideas, and concepts. Do not highlight entire paragraphs or sections of a text.

example, you might want to make a habit of highlighting main ideas, numbering supporting details such as reasons, and circling key concepts.

- *Margin notes* are a second method of annotating. You can use the margins—the white spaces on the sides of a page of text—to paraphrase, summarize, or outline key points in the text, write questions or reminders to yourself, or respond to the content. To save time and use less space, try to create your own system of abbreviations and symbols for annotating.

Now look at an annotated paragraph, excerpted from the upcoming reading "Language, Thought, and Identity." Observe how and what the student annotated. Think about these questions.

- What information did the student highlight, underline, and circle?
- What is the purpose of each annotation in the margins?
- What abbreviations and symbols does the student use?

3 Neo-Whorfian linguists continue to explore the intersection of language and cognition, but with a balanced approach. While accepting some aspects of Whorf's hypothesis, they concede it may be too extreme. They argue that language most likely has a measurable influence on worldview, and that this possibility is convincing enough to make linguistic relativity worthy of further consideration. Recent empirical neo-Whorfian studies have involved questioning speakers of different languages on notions such as time, color, and direction to uncover possible differences in perception. These studies reveal subtle distinctions among language groups. A classic example is color perception. Color is a gradation, and distinctions between colors vary from language to language. Russians, for instance, have different words for light blue and dark blue and were quicker on experimental perception tasks to distinguish between the shades of blue than English speakers, who have only one word for blue.

Margin notes:

neo-Whorfian linguists:
- Balanced approach
- Whorf too extreme
- Say lg. has infl. on wldview

(how much?)

Ex: color percep
Source? When done?
Ask Prof. Baker

Not true! Royal, aqua, navy, etc.

In the example above, the student annotated the text as follows:

- She highlighted the two main topics of the paragraph: *Neo-Whorfian linguists* and *neo-Whorfian studies.*

- She underlined key information concerning each of these topics.

- She circled the word *measurable* and wrote the question *how much?* in the margin, possibly as a reminder to ask about this later.

- In the right margin, she summarized the key points regarding neo-Whorfian linguists in her own words.

- She noted the example of the study on color perception as well as her questions about it—Who did it? When?—and wrote herself a reminder to ask her professor about it.

- Finally, she noted her disagreement with the author's statement that English has only one word for the color blue and gave examples to contradict this claim.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

The following vocabulary items appear in the reading. Circle the ones you know. Put a question mark next to the ones you do not know.

concede	conduct (v)	diversity	empirical
intersection	measurable	perception	superiority

EXERCISE 4

A. Read the first paragraph of the passage and annotate it according to the instructions that follow. Then compare annotations with a partner.

Language, Thought, and Identity

1 The question of how language relates to identity and cognition has long been the subject of study and speculation in many cultures. In Western scholarship, philosophers in the Golden Age of Greece in 500 BCE discussed the origin and function of language. Aristotle, the father of logic in philosophy, called language a representation of thought. The opposite of that theory—that thought is a representation of language—is a more recent idea about the way language works. This concept, known as *linguistic relativity*, holds that an individual's particular language shapes the way the person perceives the world, much like viewing the world through a pair of colored glasses. Linguistic relativity is also called the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis* after scholars Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, who are credited with forming the theory in the early 20th century.

Margin annotations:
500 BCE: Aristotle – thought > lang.

20th c.: _____

1. What main question does the passage address? Underline or highlight it, or use another technique you prefer.

2. The passage explains two views about the relationship between thought and language. Choose a way of annotating the key words of each view within the text. Use the same method for both views. This indicates that the ideas are related.

3. Circle or use another annotation to mark the key word in Sentence 4 that shows the relationship between the two views.

4. Fill in the summary of the key information from Sentences 2 and 3 in the right margin. Use your own words, abbreviations, and symbols.

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5. Draw an arrow to connect *linguistic relativity* with another term that has the same meaning.

6. In the margin, place question marks next to words you don't understand or concepts you want to look up later.

7. Write one margin note in response to the content. For example, you can ask a question or express your opinion. Be sure to use abbreviations and symbols.

B. **Read the rest of the essay. Make annotations to Paragraphs 2, 4, and 5, both in the text and in the margins. (Paragraph 3 is already annotated in the introduction to this section.)**

Language, Thought, and Identity, *continued*

2 While the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis grew in the mid-20th century, the foundations were laid by much older European scholars, such as philosopher Johann von Herder, who in the 1700s speculated that language contributes to identity-shaping in individuals. Around the same time, philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote that different languages do not possess "a diversity of signs and sounds but a diversity of views of the world." Sapir, and later Whorf, expanded on these early theories about the shaping of thought by language. Sapir, who was a student of the famous anthropologist Franz Boas, wrote extensively on culture and language. Sapir argued that languages are a "guide" to culture and that they influence the social reality in which the speakers live. Whorf, inspired by Sapir, went a step further and argued that one's view of the world is largely, if not entirely, shaped by language.

3 Neo-Whorfian linguists continue to explore the intersection of language and cognition but with a balanced approach. While accepting some aspects of Whorf's hypothesis, they concede it may be too extreme. They argue that language most likely has a measurable influence on worldview, and that this possibility is convincing enough to make linguistic relativity worthy of further consideration. Recent empirical neo-Whorfian studies have involved questioning speakers of different languages on notions such as time, color, and direction to uncover possible differences in perception. These studies reveal subtle distinctions among language groups. A classic example is color perception. Color is a gradation, and distinctions between

(Continued)

Glossary

Gradation: a gradual progression from one color to another

colors vary from language to language. Russians, for instance, have different words for light blue and dark blue and were quicker on experimental perception tasks to distinguish between the shades of blue than English speakers, who have only one word for the color.

4   Other linguists reject linguistic relativity completely. These critics argue that distinctions in thought about word categories like color, direction, and shape are modest, and they are not enough to support the belief that speakers of different languages have different worldviews. Critics also argue that the belief that language shapes thought can be harmful if taken to an extreme. In the past, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was used to justify the superiority or inferiority of some languages and, by extension, of the people who spoke them. For example, it was assumed that people who lacked words for certain mathematical concepts were incapable of performing mathematical functions. Seeking out differences in languages and cultures can lead to inaccurate assumptions about people. Thus many linguists today regard the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis with caution.

5   Nevertheless, the question of whether the world looks different depending on the language a person speaks is one that will likely remain a matter of debate and speculation. The arguments of the early 20th century on linguistic relativity have come a long way since the days of Whorf. Modern linguists who explore the influence of language on thought conduct interdisciplinary language experiments that cut across the fields of linguistics, psychology, and anthropology, and the results continue to raise fascinating questions about the interaction between language and thought.

CULTURE NOTE

Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941) was an American linguist best known for the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and his ideas about linguistic relativity. However, Whorf did not start out as a linguist. Instead, he was educated as a chemical engineer and worked as a fire prevention engineer for most of his career. Whorf became interested in linguistics later on and eventually studied at Yale University with his mentor, Edwin Sapir. Whorf continued to work as a fire inspector even as he gained recognition as a linguist. He did field work on Native American languages in the United States and Mexico and published works on the findings from that research.

C. Use your notes from Parts A and B to match the thinkers with their views about language and thought. Some items have more than one correct answer.

Thinker

_e_ 1. Aristotle

_a_ 2. von Herder

_d_ 3. von Humboldt

_b_ 4. Sapir

_g_ 5. Whorf

_f_ 6. Neo-Whorfian linguists

_c_ 7. Critics of Whorfianism

View

a. Language helps shape identity.

b. Language influences our social reality.

c. The view that language shapes thought may be harmful if used to justify the view that speakers of some languages are superior to others.

d. Different languages possess a diversity of views of the world.

e. Language is a representation of thought.

f. Language has a measurable (not total) influence on our worldview.

g. One's view of the world is entirely shaped by language.

D. **Work with a partner. Answer the questions about annotating.**

1. Check your answers to Part C. Were you able to use your notes to answer the questions correctly? If not, what information was missing from your notes?

2. Did you write questions to yourself in the margins? If so, ask your partner to answer them.

3. Which did you use more—in-text notes or margin notes? Why?

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VOCABULARY CHECK

A. Review the vocabulary items in the Vocabulary Preview. Write their definitions and add examples. Use a dictionary if necessary.

B. Complete each sentence using the correct vocabulary item from the box. Use the correct form.

concede 8	conduct (v) 6	diversity 7	empirical 5
intersection 4	measurable 3	perception 2	superiority 1

1. For generations scholars have been arguing about the .... of one language-teaching method over another.

2. The study concerned learners' .... of second-language sounds that did not exist in their first language.

3. There is a .... difference in the number of words that children at different ages can understand.

4. The professors have a .... of opinions regarding the relationship between speech and cognition.

5. There is now a large body of .... evidence about the most efficient ways to learn and remember new vocabulary.

6. The linguistics department will .... a survey about the number of languages spoken on campus.

7. The field of neurolinguistics is concerned with the .... between language and the structure and function of the brain.

8. Considering the students' poor performance on the latest exam, the instructor had to .... that his teaching method was not working and it was time to try something new.

Ⓝ Go to MyEnglishLab to complete skill practices.

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