

Teaching Annotation using MIT's Annotation Studio Interface

By Rachel Arteaga January 25, 2014

Part of the Pedagogy Project by HASTAC Scholars

In the comments to a blog post on teaching annotation by my University of Washington colleague Rachel Shields, HASTAC Scholar Sara Georgini noted that MIT has developed a really interesting tool for collaborative online annotation of texts. In preparation for teaching in a computer integrated classroom next quarter, I have been searching for just such resources. Below is a lesson plan and handout that I have drafted. I would welcome feedback on it; if you use it, let me know how it goes!

Lesson Plan

In-Class:

Teach annotation as a practice of reading by using the relevant section of your textbook – consider a brief in-class demonstration and activity using the textbook prior to assigning this exercise as homework.

Tech requirements:

Each student must have access to the internet (no in-class tech necessary)

Instructor prep:

- Read the project background information
- Register for the Annotation Studio tool (free)
- Remember the “secret word” that you choose at registration for class distribution
- Sign in
- Choose one of the existing documents (as a guest user, you will not be able to upload your own document for annotation. For this example, I will be using *Moby-Dick* for English 111 (Composition: Literature), but English 131 (Composition: Exposition) instructors may choose a more analytical piece for an exposition focus.)
- Click on the document to open it. You will be able to annotate from here. Annotate a few lines as a model for your students. Tag your comments for organization. Check the box next to “Allow your group to view this annotation” for each comment you insert. - The site will save all of your annotations.
- Handout the assignment sheet below with instructions for student homework

Handout

Homework: Collaborative Online Annotation

Task: Practice annotation of a literary text using the Annotation Studio interface

Instructions:

- Register for the Annotation Studio tool (free) at http://app.annotationstudio.org/users/sign_in
- Sign in using your registration information and the “secret word” for our group: *****
- Click on Documents > *Moby Dick* > Chapter 1. Loomings (annotate ONLY Chapter 1.)
- Add comments and tags, making sure to check the box “Allow your group to view this annotation” for each comment you insert. Tag your comments based on the group assignments below (Ex: if you are in group one, every comment you include will be tagged “Vocabulary.”)
- Annotate the text using the guidance for each group below. By focusing each group on a specific task, we will collaboratively build a set of annotations that covers a number of categories of textual analysis.

Group One: Vocabulary: Each member of this group should locate a minimum of five different words to define for the class. Use Merriam-Webster or another authoritative dictionary to support your definitions, and include the link to the dictionary definition in your annotation. In your own words, in contemporary language, place the word into an example sentence to help to demonstrate its meaning. (I expect this to be original: do not copy and paste example sentences from the dictionary.)

NOTE: do not define cultural, literary, or geographical references, as these are the territory of group two.

Group Two: Cultural / Literary / Geographical References: Hint: there is one in the famous first sentence! What are the explanations for these references? What is the background information that a new reader of Melville’s novel would need to fully understand the allusions he is making? Each group member must find a minimum of four different references. Include external links to sites that authoritatively explain these names, places, etc.

Group Three: Claims: Is the narrator making any arguments in this chapter? Is he trying to persuade us to see the world from his point of view? Remember, he may make claims about himself, about humanity in general, about sailing, the environment, history... Each group member must locate one claim and the evidence (if any) that the narrator gives to support his claim.

Group Four: Tone / Language / Syntax: How would you describe the tone of this chapter? Annotate and describe one section that supports your answer. How would you describe Melville's use of language (the words he is choosing for descriptions) in this chapter? Annotate and describe a section that supports your answer. How would you describe the syntax (sentence construction) at work here? Annotate and describe a section that supports your answer.

Group Five: Social Contexts: Literary critics often read with an attention to gender, race, and class. To this list we might add religious and secular faiths, political statements, and any other aspects of social life one can notice in the text. Each member of this group should locate at least four notable points of social context in the first chapter (the list included here is simply for your reference; you do not need to follow it exactly.) You may choose to pose questions about these issues in your annotations, rather than attempt to write a finalized idea. Questioning elements of the text is as important as defining them.

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