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Annotation Guide

Adapted from Hunter College RWC Guide

Annotating isn't drawing all over the page, writing and highlighting anything and everything that you see. Annotating is a thoughtful process of close reading that has a number of benefits for yourself as a reader, and as a writer!

Annotating should also not be the first step in your reading process (yes, there is more than one step). I suggest a three-stage process:

1. Skimming – quickly glance over the text. Make note of the author, when it was published, where it was published. Make note of how it is graphically organized on the page; are there subsections? Is it a wall of text with no paragraph separations? Make note of any images included in the text.

2. Reading – on this pass, read the text slowly, but do not start annotating. Take a mental note of what main ideas you can pull from the text, how the author expresses themselves, and your feelings and impressions while reading. Don't write yet!

3. Annotating – this is when you sit down with a pen/highlighter/marker/your laptop's PDF mark-up tool and begin to closely read the text

Why annotate?

- Creates "bite-sized" summaries and comments that you can quickly and easily reference at a later point
- Familiarizes you with the content and organization of a text (helps you see how you can organize your own writing!)
- Allows you to closely engage with a text as you read, which is the first step in the writing process

What is an annotation?

Annotations include but are not limited to:

- Highlights/underlines
    - Often for key words or phrases
        - I often highlight the thesis, main ideas, and evidence/explanations
        - underlines are for additional info I may have a comment on for whatever reason
    - Use to mark parts of the text that you want to make note of

    - Should usually be paired with a comment in the margins explaining the highlight
- Paraphrasing/summaries
    - Capture meaning in your own words
    - Shows that you truly understand what you're reading
    - Useful for structuring and writing your own response
    - I typically include in the right-hand margin
- Descriptive outline
    - Shows the organization of a piece of writing
    - How information is introduced and developed
    - Some outline functions:
        - Thesis/Main idea
        - Sub-topics
        - Examples/evidence
        - Explanation
        - Transition
        - Conclusion
        - Counterargument
        - Summary
    - I typically include in the left-hand margin
- Comments/responses
    - Your own reactions to the text
    - Can be a thoughtful response or question about the text, but it can also be "What?!?"
- Symbols/drawings
    - Stars, arrows, circles, etc.
    - Useful for drawing connections between ideas, focusing on unfamiliar words

It's helpful to create a "key" for yourself at the top of your annotation. It makes it easier to understand what you were doing if you return to a text later. A key might look like this:

Pink highlight = thesis
Yellow highlight = subtopics
Green highlight = supporting evidence
Underline = additional bits

Bold = main idea explanation/summary
Italics = comments
Normal text = outline

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

How to Tame a Wild Tongue

Note: Annotating *does* take more time than simply reading a text. But it does get somewhat quicker the more that you do it, and the more familiarized you become with looking at a text closely!

Below is a sample of an annotated text, taken from the Hunter College RWC Guide linked above:

SAMPLE ANNOTATED TEXT

"How Come the Quantum"

By John Archibald Wheeler

Bold = Main Ideas Universal Font = Descriptive Outline *Italics = Comments*

intro of topic	What is the greatest mystery in physics today? Different physicists have different answers. My candidate for greatest mystery is a question now century old, "How come the quantum?" What is this thing, the "quantum"? It's a bundle of energy, an indivisible unit that can be sliced no more. Max Planck showed us a hundred years ago that light is emitted not in a smooth, steady flow, but in quanta. Then physicists found quantum jumps of energy, the quantum of electric charge and more. In the small-scale world, everything is lumpy.	**Greatest mystery in physics is nature of quantum.** *lumps of energy?*
description	And more than just lumpy. When events are examined closely enough, uncertainty prevails; cause and effect become disconnected. Change occurs in little explosions in which matter is created and destroyed, in which chance guides what happens, in which waves are particles and particles are waves.	**chance plays great role in change in this "small scale world"** *This means they're the same and different at the same time?*
main idea of essay	Despite all this uncertainty, quantum physics is both a practical tool and the basis of our understanding of much of the physical world. It has explained the structure of atoms and molecules, the thermonuclear burning that lights the stars, the behavior of semiconductors and superconductors, the radioactivity that heats the earth, and the comings and goings of particles from neutrinos to quarks.	**quantum physics has helped us understand material world** *both what things are and how they work*
rhetorical question	Successful, yes, but mysterious, too. Balancing the glory of quantum achievements, we have the shame of not knowing "how come." Why does the quantum exist?	**some things remains a mystery** *Science can't tell us why anything exists. We still need religion for that.*