*Annotation Studio:*

Bringing a time-honored learning practice into the digital age

*I have never annotated before, but I think I’m getting better. I am actually writing down ideas while reading. By writing them down I’m looking deeper into the text -- not like when I just read the book and say, “Oh it may mean this.” Now it is more like, “Oh what does THIS mean?” Then I keep asking questions because I am annotating. I am thinking about the text more.*

Student reflection on using Annotation Studio,   
MIT Literature Class, Fall 2012

**Introduction**

Annotation Studio is a suite of easy-to-use digital tools for web-based annotation currently being developed by HyperStudio, the digital humanities lab at MIT. Drawing on HyperStudio’s educational design expertise, Annotation Studio integrates a powerful set of textual interpretation tools behind an interface that makes using those tools intuitive for undergraduates. Designed in close collaboration with humanities faculty, Annotation Studio actively engages students in interpreting literary texts and other primary sources.

Conceptually, Annotation Studio extends the centuries-old practice of marginalia as a form of reader engagement to online texts, inspired by Vannevar Bush’s[[1]](#footnote-0) and Theodor Nelson’s[[2]](#footnote-1) notion of knowledge creation through linkage of documents and commentary. In combination with large online text, image, video, and audio repositories, Annotation Studio allows students to experience texts as a “multi-dimensional space,” as a “tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture,”[[3]](#footnote-2) (Roland Barthes) while becoming aware of what Wolfgang Iser calls the “act of reading”[[4]](#footnote-3) by making reading and annotating a transparent and shared process.

Ongoing assessment shows that students using Annotation Studio read with greater comprehension and retention while honing the foundational skills of humanities research, writing, and presentation. Through what Joanna Wolfe has described as the process of “provok[ing] students to reflect more critically upon the primary text,” the aligned annotations and processes of Annotation Studio have been found to strengthen students’ critical thinking and argumentation skills.[5]

Interest in Annotation Studio has grown beyond our initial expectations and is shaping our plans for future development of the prototype. While we valued the significant differences between Annotation Studio and the many other web-based annotation tools that are currently available, we could not be certain of the demand from prospective users. Judging by the groundswell of inquiries from instructors worldwide who are interested in adopting the application, it is clear that Annotation Studio is indeed responding to an unmet need for an educationally oriented annotation tool that is a) easy to use for both faculty and students and b) flexible enough to support teaching and learning in a wide range of subjects and settings. Extensive feedback from users at MIT and beyond has also helped us rethink the future development of the application.

Drawing on our experience developing and testing the Annotation Studio prototype, this white paper will provide detailed insights into:

1. Annotation Studio’s historical and conceptual context
2. Qualities that make Annotation Studio unique, including
   * 1. Co-design practices
     2. Open-source development processes
     3. Classroom orientation and outcomes
3. Plans for future deployment & expansion

**Historical & Conceptual Context**

Annotation is a practice with a rich and varied history in the humanities, one intertwined with, and therefore as complex as, the history of reading itself. Practiced extensively by artists and thinkers like Montaigne, S. T. Coleridge, William Blake, Harriet Martineau and Samuel Clemens, to name just a few, annotation was also a formal pedagogy in the universities of Renaissance France and England. Indeed, the impulse to make marks on a page is so widespread and deeply rooted that it seems to reflect not a cultural formation, as is writing itself, but rather a natural one: the kinesthetic dimension of learning. In this respect, annotation is intuitive – a practice that readers would follow even without prior historical direction, and therefore wanders across the timeline of the humanities with irregular bursts and continuities.[1]

Throughout all its variations, however, one dominant theme of annotation that persists is *its enduring connection with the learning process*. Metaphors for reading hint at this connection: for instance, the metaphor of digestion, in which the reader breaks down the text into parts for easier assimilation. The intuition that lies behind these figures is that reading is not only a visual and auditory process, but is also, in important ways, kinesthetic. The act of annotating the page, of reprocessing the text into new and personal forms, is a routine (though often unnoticed) mechanism for readers to focus their attention and enter into the workings of the text. "A marked or annotated book," Jackson writes, "traces the development of the reader's self-definition in and by relation to the text," identifying the process with discovery of one's own identity. [2]

*Annotation Studio* is a web-based, aligned[3] annotation application that brings the long humanistic tradition of annotation into the era of electronic media, As it reconnects the reader to the long history of annotation practices, Annotation Studio also opens up the vast resources of digital text, images, and video to seamless marginal commentary. The primary design goal is simplicity of use for both students and instructors, who may participate actively with each other and with designers through the term to develop effective educational use cases. Annotation Studio, then, is also designed to work as an adaptable tool for ongoing educational innovation.

This innovative web application engages students in the process of interpreting literary texts and other humanities media documents by searching curated multimedia collections for relevant materials, posting comments, tagging, remixing, and sharing with other users – skills that today’s students have already acquired from the many hours they’ve spent interacting with peers on the Internet. Instead of skimming over difficult passages or being frustrated by them, students use the annotation tool in combination with their new-media skills to open up the texts their instructors assign. Instead of reading more passively, they read while actively discovering, annotating, comparing, sampling, illustrating, and representing – activities that John Unsworth has dubbed “scholarly primitives.”[4] By enabling the user to tag texts using folksonomies rather than TEI, Annotation Studio allows students to practice scholarly primitives quite naturally, thereby discovering how literary texts can be opened up through exploration of sources, influences, editions, and adaptations.

[1] Studies of reading history have established a considerable tradition of textual annotation as a variety of mnemonic, learning, and interpretation practices. See, for example, Stephen A. Barney, ed., Annotation and Its Texts, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); David Greetham, The Margins of the Text (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Steven Zwicker, “Reading the Margins: Politics and the Habits of Appropriation,” Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution, Ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press:, 1998); H. J. Jackson, Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); William H. Sherman, “What Did Renaissance Readers Write in Their Books?” Books and Readers in Early Modern England, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[2] Jackson, Marginalia, p. 87

[3] Aligned annotation refers to annotation systems in which the highlighted target text and its annotation are aligned horizontally in parallel fields, as found in most print marginalia. Other annotation systems that have been developed use the “post-it” model of a floating field, the “in-line” model of an in-text bracketed field, and the “footnote” model of the sub-field. See Joanna Wolfe, “Annotations and the collaborative digital library: Effects of an aligned annotation interface on student argumentation and reading strategies,” Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (2008) 3:141-64.

[4] In 2000, John Unsworth defined scholarly primitives as “self-understood” functions common to scholarly activity across disciplines, over time, and independent of theoretical orientation. (John Unsworth: "Scholarly Primitives: what methods do humanities researchers have in common, and how might our tools reflect this?", May 13, 2000, (<http://www3.isrl.illinois.edu/~unsworth/Kings.5-00/primitives.html>, August 17, 2011)

*Annotation Studio’s MIT roots*

Annotation Studio is grounded in a technology-supported pedagogy that has been developing in undergraduate literature and foreign language classes at MIT over the past decade. Senior Lecturer Wyn Kelley (co-author of *Teachers’ Strategy Guide for Reading in a Participatory Culture for Project New Media Literacies*) was one of the first to explore how approaches to “reading in a participatory culture” could be integrated into literature and writing classes. She had observed that many students viewed reading and writing about classic literature as foreign tasks fraught with difficulty. However, when Kelley asked her students to annotate texts by drawing on multi-media sources, these inhibitions disappeared. Imagining themselves as editors charged with making a text understandable to others, students became more skilled readers and writers.

For the past two years, the HyperStudio team has been collaborating with Kelley and the MIT Literature Department to realize the potential of digital annotation for pedagogy, first through a project called Miximize, and more recently through the Annotation Studio project. Both projects build on the success of Metamedia, a pedagogical platform developed at MIT over 10 years ago. Metamedia facilitates learning by providing a space where students interact with media-rich materials, one another, and their instructors, forming online learner communities. Faculty-created projects built on the Metamedia platform have served close to 2,500 MIT students in Literature, Foreign Language and Literatures, Comparative Media Studies, Music and Theater Arts, and History classes – and many remain in continuous use, supported and updated by HyperStudio staff.

Like its precursors, Annotation Studio is created for undergraduate classroom use and has functionalities that target core humanities skills (close reading, interpretation, argumentation, writing). When fully developed, Annotation Studio will help students turn insights inspired by close reading into arguments based on evidence derived from primary humanities documents in a variety of media formats. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

My pedagogy around Annotation Studio started long before I began working with MIT’s HyperStudio to develop the tool. I had long been interested in ideas about literary remixing and was already assigning students to research the sources and adaptations of literary texts, especially in my introductory Writing About Literature class, where we spend considerable time with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The idea was for students to “edit” the novel collaboratively by supplying the historical or literary glosses and essays that one might find in a Norton Critical Edition. I imagined that it might be possible to create a digital version of this idea, one that could provide access to an author’s literary influences and writing process through close reading and annotation.

Engaging students more actively in editing their texts and in a digital format opened up possibilities I had never seen before. I found that Annotation Studio’s simple design allowed students to access their texts and manipulate them directly. They could select any passage that interested them, add comments and tags, and choose whether to make the comments public or keep them private. Even before we made the comments public, students could see highlights of the text indicating where other students had annotated. This visual effect provided a map of the text showing the interest it generated in a particular group of readers. Students used the workspace not only to note unfamiliar words, mark text for later use in their essays, or record brief impressions—small stuff—but also to return to their ideas at the revision stage and develop them more fully. At the end of the year I made a poster of some of the annotations of *Frankenstein* (see Appendix). This poster displays the range and sophistication of their comments, work coming, it should be noted, from first-year students in a subject designed for those who did not pass the entrance Writing Exam.

*Wyn Kelley, Senior Lecturer, MIT*

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**What makes Annotation Studio unique?**

Annotation Studio’s distinctiveness is not so much a matter of its functionality -- though its combination of features is indeed unique among annotation applications -- but is rather a function of the development process that is producing this educational tool. From the start, the Annotation Studio team has been committed to practicing co-design with end users (instructors and students), building on the best available open-source tools, and focusing on educational uses.

*Co-design with students and instructors*

The Annotation Studio team has adopted a collaborative design process that engages the end users from the start. Feedback from students and faculty using the prototype has continuously informed ongoing software development, resulting in intensive efforts being invested in fine-tuning core functionality – not because the features in question did not work as intended, but because users were able to suggest how core functionality could be modified to fit their needs even better. Rather than maximizing the number of advanced features built into the application, the team has focused on perfecting the core features from the user’s perspective. As a result, we have created an application whose elegance and simplicity of use is the end result of a complex process of iterative refinement in collaboration with the targeted user population.

While this approach may result in fewer features, it also ensures that all functionality is selected and refined to serve the purposes of our targeted users, setting our tool apart from commercially available, multi-purpose software. We believe that Annotation Studio is better for humanities teaching and learning than any other tool of its kind because we have taken a user-first rather than a features-first approach.

*Use of open source technologies*

In considering how best to build the proposed annotation application, we surveyed the field of available open source software related to our project and discovered that the Open Knowledge Foundation’s *Annotator* included a core set of features that supported and complemented what we proposed to develop. By choosing to build on the Annotator’s strengths rather than creating all of the proposed features from scratch, we significantly accelerated software development, enabling us to focus on distinctive needs associated with using annotations in an educational context. Accelerating software development also enabled us to invest more resources in working with faculty users to integrate the tool into their curriculum and instruction. Just as significantly, our decision to incorporate the Annotator has connected us with a community of developers, theorists, and practitioners who are actively collaborating to produce a common core of adaptable annotation software and to develop a W3C open annotation standard that supports the ability to exchange and reuse annotations across tools and platforms.

*Focus on classroom integration and learning outcomes*

From the start, Annotation Studio has been conceived as an educational tool; therefore, our co-design partners have been students and teachers, our testing environment has been the classroom (13 undergraduate classes during the 2012-2013 academic year), and our measures of success -- other than ease of use -- have been entirely defined by educational outcomes. Concurrent classroom integration has been critical to the iterative development process of Annotation Studio and bi-weekly pedagogy meeting with participating faculty have supported the development of new teaching and learning practices.

We have conducted an extensive assessment of Annotation Studio’s use in the courses where it was piloted during the fall 2012 semester, identifying what worked well and what needed to be changed to support ease of use and learning goals. Evidence from this assessment activity – which included surveys, observations, and interviews with faculty and students – showed that use of Annotation Studio supports:

* Close reading: paying attention to details, not just broad themes or plot.
* Strengthening memory of texts read, with marked improvement of recall during discussions.
* Generating original material that can be developed into essays.
* Taking effective notes, quoting passages responsibly, citing sources.
* Developing arguments; making connections across texts; formulating questions.
* Developing a distinctive critical voice and confidence in one’s own opinions.
* Creating a community around reading, writing, and classroom discussion.

Most students noted that Annotation Studio encouraged them to do closer reading of the text, to clarify the meaning of certain words and phrases, and to ask themselves more questions while reading.

“When I started annotating online, I ended up doing much more annotation than I would usually do in the hard copy of the text. I ended up doing like a word-by-word analysis of the passage. It was very easy to organize my thoughts in Annotation Studio when I have everything I needed highlighted and with comments.”

“The [physical] book just gives you the raw material . . . But when I go online then I can get actual ideas behind the words. I can expand on things more clearly and carefully.”

Many students also noted that Annotation Studio helps them compose papers.

“I noticed that when I have to write in a book, I have to write in a short phrases. You just write enough to jog your memory . . . But online I write like a full paragraph. It was really nice when I went back and saw, Oh my god, I wrote a lot! I already had my thoughts right there so I could just cut it and paste them in my paper. Just to have this space to write in is great.”

“Annotation Studio made it definitely easier for me to write my assignments. When I went back there, everything was organized and right there . . . I did not just copy and paste them [annotations] but I develop my ideas further. The initial annotation sparked me and let the rest of the paragraphs get developed.”

“When you see other people’s annotations, you think, “Oh. I have never thought about this . . . Now when you mention it, I could see this point in many places in the book and could probably write a paper about it.”

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I used Annotation Studio in class for exercises in close reading and class discussion, finding that students adapted to it quickly and easily as a way to share a text and comments. In fact, I noticed that students were also taking notes in *Annotation Studio*, keying their own remarks or those they’d heard in class directly to the places in the text we discussed. This classroom note-taking use arose naturally from the students’ rapid understanding of the ways Annotation Studio could focus and expedite their work.

More often, the annotations took place outside of class, as students prepared for reports and essays. My assignments include detailed instructions on how to use Annotation Studio as a tool for assembling examples of a theme, inserting historical data or other kinds of notes into the text, and developing first impressions into more thoughtful readings [see appendix]. I was struck by two changes from my students’ usual practices in preparing for essays. One was that they quoted more often and more aptly from the text. The simple act of selecting text before writing a comment meant that they could not generalize about the text, as they are prone to do when they are unsure of what to say. Annotation Studio gave them materials precisely selected for their essays, which they could then shape and develop. The second effect was that they took their research more seriously. Since I often asked them how an author’s reading or historical circumstances influenced the text, they could now find and annotate specific examples, add what they’d learned from their research, and then include these in their essay for analysis. I was startled at the increased confidence and expertise my students gained from this work. By entering the text’s world as editors, rather than as disempowered readers or inexperienced writers, they discover unexpected skills in themselves and take unanticipated pleasure in the text.

*Wyn Kelley, Senior Lecturer, MIT*

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I used Annotation Studio on a very limited basis, for two in-class close reading exercises. I was curious to see how useful it would be if the students only worked with it once or twice.

In class, I hooked up my computer to an overhead projector and spent a few minutes showing the students how to use Annotation Studio. I then gave them ten minutes to annotate the passage from *Jane Eyre* that I had chosen. The students enjoyed the process so much that they asked to be able to keep annotating the text; I gave them another ten minutes, but they could easily have gone longer. Next, using the overhead, we went through the passage together. I would point out a word or phrase that had been highlighted and ask the students who had marked it to discuss their annotations. We spent about a half-hour discussing the students’ comments and could easily have taken more time.

This in-class reading exercise was a great success. One aspect that I had not expected was how eager the students were to discuss their annotations. Even my two shy students spoke confidently; it was clear that, having already worked out ideas about the text, they were more comfortable discussing it . . . It was also instructive to be able to view students’ comments in real-time: I gained an eye-opening window on their close-reading thought processes, I got a quick sense for the parts of the text it would be productive to focus on for discussion, and I was able to respond to their comments as they wrote them, answering questions they posed or putting links to online information.

Although students did not articulate much of an interest in Annotation Studio’s inherent sociality, it was clear to me that this had also positively affected them. The students often responded to one another’s comments during the annotation time, and they were interested to compare other students’ interpretations with their own. It was also clear that the exercise was beneficial as a pre-writing activity: several students expanded on their annotations in their *Jane Eyre* essays.

What surprised me most about using Annotation Studio was how eager it made me to take a more experimental approach to my teaching. Annotation Studio had real advantages compared to doing the same exercise on paper—for both the students and for me—and moreover, the experience went so well that it opened me up to taking more risks by trying new tools in the classroom.

*Julia Panko*

As a freshman at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I was first introduced to Annotation Studio in an introductory literature class called Reading Fiction. Because our class was communications intensive, our professor emphasized the reading and writing process in our assignments. Annotation Studio was introduced as a tool to help us learn and develop our own methods for reading and writing. This was the first time in all my years of education that I had been introduced to a tech tool used for a humanities class. My initial expectation was that we would use Annotation Studio as a supplement to our class work, maybe just to share thoughts between classmates outside of the classroom. Instead, Annotation Studio was an integral part of every one of our reading and writing assignments.

Our first assignment with Annotation Studio was to create annotations using the online program so that our professor could see our thoughts about the text. At first, this seemed to be no different than taking notes in the book itself or on a separate piece of paper like I would normally do while reading, but I quickly realized the advantages that Annotation Studio provided. As a college student, I am always on the move. Because of this, it is difficult to find a solid chunk of time to pull out a text, paper, and a pen to actively read and annotate the text. With Annotation Studio, it is much easier and more accessible to work with the online version of the text. Annotation Studio also keeps all our annotations visible as we scroll through the text, which was very useful for me because I could keep track of certain themes or ideas I was interested in and wanted to follow throughout the novel. With paper, annotations are not kept in the same location and previous ideas and thoughts can be lost in the jumble of notes. This organizational advantage played a huge role not only in the reading process, but also in the writing process.

Annotation Studio was even more useful to me during the writing process than the reading process. The compilation of annotations I had made while reading were all available in one location for me to sift through and try to connect ideas to create a thesis for my paper. Annotation Studio provided a great starting point for an essay, which is often the most difficult part for me in the writing process. One of my most memorable experiences with Annotation Studio was with an assignment for which we had to write a research paper explaining the significance of one of Charlotte Bronte’s literary allusions in *Jane Eyre*. Presented with this large-scope assignment, I was a bit overwhelmed at first because Bronte used many allusions and I had to pick one that would provide me ample material to write my paper. Our professor suggested we use Annotation Studio to help us get organized and find allusions within the text. As I read *Jane Eyre*, I took careful note of any allusions to Shakespeare I saw within the text as I was interested in Bronte’s extensive use of Shakespeare’s literature. Soon I had compiled a list of annotations that highlighted significant allusions of the novel. From this comprehensive list, I was able to narrow down my choice of literature to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* because my annotations of allusions to *Macbeth* were extensive and I could formulate the thesis that Bronte and Shakespeare used similar devices to emphasize a certain theme. When I had reached the end of my search, I was very surprised at how efficiently and effectively Annotation Studio had helped me jump-start my essay. Without Annotation Studio, I would have had to collect my annotations on pieces of paper and try to compile them in one place so I could try to organize my thoughts and ideas and find connections. With Annotation Studio, I could also easily go back to the exact word, sentence of paragraph pertaining to my annotations to rethink my logic and ideas that lead to my thesis. Once I had chosen the literary text to focus on and had done some research on *Macbeth* to identify some specific themes similar in both texts, I went back to Annotation Studio to help me find specific examples and evidence to write a concrete paper. I went back to the locations I had already marked and conducted a closer reading of the text, adding to my previous annotations with deeper analysis from my research. Not only did Annotation Studio help me start my paper, but it also helped me provide solid evidence to support my thesis. I was extremely proud and impressed by the efficiency and quality my essay, all with the help of Annotation Studio.

As the semester wore on, I began to use this approach to all my essays: first starting with my annotations to create a preliminary thesis and then going back to specific areas in the novel to annotate further and create a stronger basis for my essay. Using this approach, I saw a steady improvement in my writing skills. I also was able to contribute to class discussions much more effectively because of annotations I had done to prepare for class. Because of this pattern that I had developed, I became confident in my writing and enjoyed approaching the essays much more than at the beginning of the year.

At one point in my second literature class, we read a more modern novel that was not yet available to Annotation Studio because of copyright issues. Without the use of Annotation Studio, I had to revert back to the older paper and pen technique for annotations. During this assignment, I truly appreciated the value of Annotation Studio and how much easier it made the reading and writing process.

After a whole year of using Annotation Studio, I am extremely glad I was introduced to this tool because it helped my build and develop confidence in my reading and writing skills and the way I approach literary analysis.

Lakshmi Subbaraj

MIT undergraduate

1. Future Plans
   1. Customizing the Experience: Marking Up, Filtering, Personal Archives, Juxtaposition
   2. Visualization for Classroom Use, Reading Across Texts, Peer Review
   3. Supporting the Writing Cycle
   4. Annotating other media types (image, video, audio)

Based on that feedback, we are planning to integrate textual annotation into a larger reading-commenting-writing-review cycle. We will also address a growing desire to use such tools across a variety of platforms and devices, and to exchange annotations across different tools through a common format such as W3C’s Open Annotation Standard.

*From report*

Ongoing development of the Annotation Studio application is completely rooted in our concurrent classroom integration efforts at MIT and beyond. Feedback from users in the fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters has generated our priority list of features that will be included in the completed application. These include:

1. Simple user uploading of documents for annotation. Faculty and students using the MIT internal app and partner users of the public app are eager to be able to upload their own texts – including both source texts and student-authored essays – in a variety of formats including PDF and Word. Currently, users *can* upload texts, but since they must first be converted to HTML format, few users have the skills or patience to do so. Therefore, the HyperStudio team has been uploading all texts for annotation, a practice that does not support widespread adoption of Annotation Studio by instructors and individual users.

We have always planned for future iterations of Annotation Studio to support simple user uploading of texts in a range of formats (including TEI), but had postponed implementation of this feature to a later phase of development, not anticipating the demand that the prototype’s success has generated or the eagerness among faculty across the country to begin using it in their classrooms. In order to make rapid, widespread adoption possible, functionality that supports easy uploading of texts in a variety of formats has become a top priority on our software development agenda.

In addition to making it possible for users to easily upload source texts for annotation, this functionality will also support uploading student-created essays, making them available for annotation by faculty, writing instructors, and/or peers.

2. Ability to export user annotations for future use in essays and other compositions. This is the most significant feature request that we had not fully anticipated at the beginning of the start-up phase. Students and instructors have often requested the ability to reuse annotations in compositions. Since annotations also carry the originally quoted text along with the student comments, plus the metadata of the text, such a feature will also support better citation practices among students.

3. Fine-grained annotation of images. Students and faculty alike often requested the ability to annotate parts of images to express their arguments using different media. Images for annotation can either be embedded with the base text or used a standalone image files.

4. Color-coding of annotations. Users requested the ability to color-code annotations by self-defined criteria (e.g. based on tags, questions, locations, etc.) and by author. Building on this request, we will also implement other graphical options to mark annotations within a given text, including underlines and boxes around selected passages.

5. Flexible management of texts associated with specific courses and user groups. Based on user feedback, we will be developing a scalable mechanism to effectively display and group documents being used by specific courses and learner communities (e.g. classes, working groups within classes, etc.)

1. Appendix
   1. Two Essay Assignments by Wyn Kelley

**21L000/21W041J Essay 1 (1250 words)**

**Due September 19, 2012**

**Close Reading**

For this essay you will complete a set of steps listed below to produce a five-page (1250 words) reading of details in a chapter from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Your job is to move away from general statements about the text and challenge yourself and your peers with more information and insight.

**Goals**

1. To use annotation to observe and document your own process of reading
2. To focus on details and let your ideas emerge from the text. (For the revision due 10/3 you will get a chance to develop your observations more fully).

**Writing Skills**

1. Close reading of language
2. Development of observations in clearly structured and well-formed paragraphs
3. Correct use of grammar and sentence structure
4. Correct use of MLA Works Cited format

**Process**

1. Read Volume 1, Chapter IV (pp. 34-38, *Norton Critical Edition*) of the 1818 edition of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.
2. Go to Annotation Studio ([http://annotationstudio.mit.edu](http://annotationstudio.mit.edu/)). Follow the instructions for registering at the site and familiarize yourself with the tool, if you have not done so already.
3. Using Annotation Studio, annotate the online text of this chapter. Mark striking passages, unfamiliar words, details that amuse or puzzle or move you, references to sources, unusual phrasing, or words that point to important issues for understanding character or theme in the text. Add comments for later consideration.
4. You may annotate as many details as you wish and make your comments any length. Some suggestions for ways to organize your work:
   1. Try to get a variety of different *kinds* of annotations, from the personal impression, to something that requires looking up information in a dictionary or encyclopedia, to something reflective or interpretive.
   2. Alternatively, note examples of a certain phenomenon you have noticed: sensory images, or place names, or allusions to other authors, or language reminiscent of details from elsewhere in the novel.
   3. Cover material from various parts of the chapter or alternatively focus on a particular paragraph or moment. Consider why you have chosen the approach you did.
5. When you have finished your online annotation, you can begin developing the data you generated through this work.
   1. Find information to answer questions you have about certain details.
   2. Look for patterns in the details you notice—certain repetitions of sounds, words, or phrases, or conversely significant breaks or changes in a pattern.
   3. See what questions or discoveries your annotations inspire. Do multiple readings of a certain passage suggest meanings you did not see at first? Does Shelley use certain references or kinds of language for a particular effect? What parts of the chapter seem most energetic and immediate? Do you see a certain change in the focus of the chapter?
6. Having taken notes on your annotations, please write your paper as a report for your peers on what emerged from your study of the chapter’s details.
   1. You may speak in the first person about your process of reading and thinking about the text.
   2. You may choose a format that works for you; no need to employ a five-paragraph structure or to advance an argument.
   3. You can entertain questions and doubts and withhold answers and certainties.
7. For material from outside sources (consider a dictionary or encyclopedia a source), use MLA Works Cited format, and make a Works Cited list at the end of the paper. Your Norton Edition of *Frankenstein* should be cited correctly.

**21L000/21W041J Essay 2 (1250 words)**

**Due October 24, 2012**

**Sources in Shelley’s *Frankenstein***

For this essay you will move to a new level of annotation—to identify Shelley’s sources in *Frankenstein*. Drawing on the research you did for your report, annotate whatever parts of the text relate to your source. Then, reading closely and comparing passages from your two texts (source and Shelley), develop an argument for the significance of Shelley’s use of this source in *Frankenstein*.

**Goals**  Your goal is to build on your annotations, research, feedback from your in-class report, and rereading of *Frankenstein* to address the way Shelley brings meaning into the text by referring to sources her readers probably would have recognized. Your essay will allow you to develop expertise on this topic so that you can offer your peers a reading of the text that they may not have considered.

**Writing Skills**

1. Organizing a range of research materials into a well-structured essay.

2. Developing a focused thesis that addresses details in the text and in your research.

3. Using evidence effectively to support your thesis.

4. Handling citations and a “Works Cited” list correctly.

**Annotation**

Please see the annotation handout for examples of different kinds of references and ways to use them in your annotation.

**Research**

This essay should include more “Works Cited” than your first *Frankenstein* paper, since you will have a source text and may have gotten ideas from reference and scholarly materials as well. You may also find that you want to look for new materials after you do your report. Remember that any texts listed in a “Works Cited” section must actually be cited in your essay. If you used texts that do not get cited in your paper, you can put them in a “Works Consulted” section, using the same format as for “Works Cited.”

**Stages of the Essay**

1. Start with the annotation, as in the first essay, marking up a passage or passages in the digital Shelley text. Depending on your topic, you may have many or just a few annotations. As in your revision, try to make your annotations count. These should include authoritative information (you can include links to sites, texts, and images) as well as thoughtful commentary.
2. Construct a thesis that addresses the problems raised by the question above: What is the significance of Shelley’s use of this source in *Frankenstein*?
3. Drawing on your annotation, report, and research materials, write an essay that develops your thesis through close reading of the details in passages you have selected.
   1. Although your scope will be larger than for the first essay, you do not need to generalize for the whole text. Keep your focus narrow.
   2. Try to present a thesis that offers something new in your reading, an idea or detail we have not considered fully before or one that illuminates the text in a fresh way.
   3. Draw on your annotation to supply details to support your close reading.
   4. Draw on your research to support and ground your ideas about Shelley’s use of her source.
   5. Come to a conclusion that explores the implications of your study. Try not to summarize but to open up your argument.
4. Leave yourself time to revise.
   1. Think about audience. Your readers are MIT peers who would like guidance to the book. They will not need plot summary or broad thematic outline—readily available at Cliff’s Notes or SparkNotes—but will be looking for ways to understand Shelley’s abundant and often puzzling references to a world of texts.
   2. Provide your essay with an informative title and supply a correct “Works Cited” list. Do quote from Shelley’s text (use Norton page numbers), and if you wish to supply an appendix with your source-text material, that can also be helpful.
   3. Make sure each paragraph has a clear topic sentence that relates to and forwards the thesis.
   4. Check grammatical errors. Pare wordiness and redundancy.

1. Vannevar Bush: “As we May Think”, The Atlantic Monthly, July 1945 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Theodor Nelson: “Literary Machines”, check exact reference [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Ronald Barthes: “The Death of the Author”, in: Image, music, text, New York 1997 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Wolfgang Iser: The Implied Reader; Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett, Baltimore 1974

   [5] Wolfe, “Annotations and the collaborative digital library,” 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)