

# Annotating Text

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## Purpose

Annotating text goes beyond underlining, highlighting, or making symbolic notations or codes on a given text. Annotation includes adding purposeful notes, key words and phrases, definitions, and connections tied to specific sections of text. Annotating text promotes student interest in reading and gives learners a focused purpose for writing. It supports readers' ability to clarify and synthesize ideas, pose relevant questions, and capture analytical thinking about text. Annotation also gives students a clear purpose for actively engaging with text and is driven by the goals or learning targets of the lesson. It helps learners comprehend difficult material and engage in what Probst (1988) describes as “dialogue with the text.”

## Materials

- Writing utensil (colored if desired)
- Optional: sticky notes
- Optional: Applications such as Notability, which allow you to annotate PDFs and electronic text

## Procedure

1. Define the purpose for annotation based on learning target(s) and goals. Some examples include:
  - Locating evidence in support of a claim
  - Identifying main idea and supporting details
  - Analyzing the validity of an argument or counterargument
  - Determining author's purpose
  - Giving an opinion, reacting, or reflecting
  - Identifying character traits/motivations
  - Summarizing and synthesizing
  - Defining key vocabulary
  - Identifying patterns and repetitions
  - Making connections/making predictions
2. Model how to annotate text:
  - Select one paragraph of text from the reading and highlight or underline key word(s) or phrase(s) related to the lesson's purpose, using the “think aloud” strategy to share with students why you marked certain selections of the passage.
  - Based on your “think aloud,” model writing an annotated note in the margin, above underlined words and phrases, or to the side of text.
3. Distribute the materials students will need, such as books, articles, highlighters, and pencils, or cue up the appropriate text and software on student-used technology (such as an iPad). *continued*

4. Practice annotating with students, choosing another paragraph/section of text and reminding them of the purpose. Have them highlight, underline, or circle relevant words and phrases in the reading and add annotations. Have students share what they selected and explain their annotations. Repeat over several classes or as necessary, working on gradual release toward student independence.

## Variations

- Annotations can look very different while accomplishing the same purpose—engaging deeply with text—depending on the focus of the lesson and the needs and preferences of the learners.

## References

Porter-O'Donnell, C. (2004, January 1). Beyond the yellow highlighter: Teaching annotation skills to improve reading comprehension. *English Journal*, 82-89.

Probst, R. (1988, January 1). Dialogue with a text. *English Journal*, 32-28.

Wolfe, J., & Neuwirth, C. (2001, January 1). From the margins to the center: The future of annotation. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 333-371.