Tips for Writers ● Reading Strategies
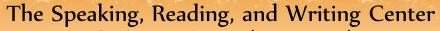# Annotating Textbooks

Annotating is a way of marking your textbook by taking key points from the text. In addition to underlining or highlighting, you should annotate because it will help you **understand** and **remember** information. Publishers often include wide margins in college textbooks to encourage students to annotate.
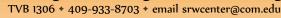
If you only underline or highlight, you may limit your learning because they can be done without thinking very actively. However, to annotate you must **think actively.** When you annotate, you're not only reading; you're already **beginning to study** the material. This is why annotating is more effective.

How do you annotate?

1. Always **read with a pen in hand.**

2. **Annotate what's most important.**
    o Main ideas (summarize stated main ideas; try to write out implied main ideas)
    o Definitions (indicate with **dfn** in the margin)
    o Examples (indicate with **ex** in the margin)
    o Lists of reason or characteristics   (number them; perhaps also summarize each one)
    o Concepts that show cause and effect relationships, or similarities and differences (use arrows to show the connections)
    o Summary statements   (paraphrase in the margin and circle)
    o Unfamiliar words (put a box around them, or underline with a red pen)
    o Signal words (circle them)

3. **Annotate one section at a time.** Survey the section first, and then read all the information under the heading. Then determine what's important to write in the margin.

4. **Annotate <u>before</u> you underline or highlight.** This will reduce the amount you'll need to underline or highlight.

5. **Annotate in your own words**, using as few words as possible. Don't just copy. Think about what you're reading, and accurately paraphrase it. This helps you monitor your learning. If you can't write the information in your own words, then you probably don't understand it.

6. **Turn headings into questions.** When you find the answer to your question, place parentheses around the answer and write **imp** in the margin.

7. **Number items in a list.** Write out a brief heading for that list.

(see back for more tips on annotation)

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8. Put **?** to indicate **information that you do not understand.**

9. Put **>** next to **information that may be important** (but you're not sure).

10. Mark important ideas with ***** or **imp** in the margin.

11. **Use numbers for lists and sequences**.

12. Put **T** next to items that are **likely to be on the test.**

13. Put **SUM** next to a summary statement.

14. **Use abbreviations and symbols**. Develop a personalized marking system that's meaningful to you.

15. Write **comments in the margins** to help you connect the material with instructor comments and your own experience.

16. **Re-read** any parts that you did not understand.

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