Annotating a Text

Annotating a text, or marking the pages with notes, is an excellent way to make the most out of the reading you do for your classes. Annotations make it easy to find important information quickly. They help you familiarize yourself with both the content and organization of what you read. They provide a way to begin engaging ideas and issues directly through comments, questions, associations, or other reactions that occur to you as you read. In all these ways, annotating a text makes the reading process an active one.

A well-annotated text will accomplish all of the following:

•clearly identify where in the text important ideas and information are located
•express the main ideas of a text
•express the reader's thoughts and reactions
•identify and clarify unknown vocabulary

You should read a text through once before making annotations (although you may want to circle unknown vocabulary on the first read). This way, you will have a clearer idea about where major ideas and important information are in the text, and your annotating will be more efficient. A brief description and discussion of four ways of annotating a text follow:

1) Underlining
Underlining key words and phrases or major ideas is the most common form of annotating texts. Many people use this method to make it easier to review material, especially for exams. However, it is important to note that there is a tendency to underline more information than necessary. Instead of being a way to begin thinking about and interacting with ideas in texts, underlining can become a postponement of that process. On the other hand, underlining is a useful way of marking the parts of a text that you want to annotate. (10-20% of the article)

2) Paraphrasing/Summarizing Main Ideas
Going beyond locating important ideas to being able to capture their meaning by paraphrasing is a way of solidifying your understanding of these ideas. A series of brief summaries in the margins beside important ideas gives you a handy summary right on the pages of the text itself, and if you can take the substance of a sentence or paragraph and condense it into a few words, you should have little trouble clearly demonstrating your understanding of the ideas. (4 per article)

3) Reader Response
You should use annotation to go beyond understanding a text's meaning. You should note your reactions–agreement/disagreement, questions, related personal experience, connection to ideas from other texts, class discussions, etc. These are text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections that make the reading personal to you so that you are more likely to both understand and remember what you read. (4 per article)

4) Vocabulary
You should circle unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts. Often you will be able to use context clues to help you determine the meaning of an unknown word. You should circle the unfamiliar word and indicate what you think the word means by annotating the text. You should then check for accuracy by finding the word in the dictionary and writing the definition on the page. (4 per article)

Article of the Week

Directions: Review the "Annotating a Text" handout and use the information to guide your thinking. Demonstrate evidence of close reading by completing the following:

1. Underline key words and phrases or major ideas.
2. Paraphrase and summarize main ideas throughout the article.
3. Respond to the text by indicating your reactions, questions, and personal connections to the text.
4. Circle and determine the meaning of unknown vocabulary and concepts.
5. Answer the questions at the end of the article.

Article of the Week Rubric	There is no evidence that the objective was met.	There is little evidence that the objective was met.	There is some evidence that the objective was met.	There is clear evidence that the objective was met.	There is thorough evidence that the objective was met.
Underlining indicates the key words, phrases, and major ideas throughout the text. (10-20%)	0	5	10	15	20
The main ideas are paraphrased and summarized throughout the text. (M=4 total)	0	5	10	15	20
Reader's reactions, questions, and personal connections appear throughout the text. (R=4 total)	0	5	10	15	20
Unknown vocabulary and/or concepts are circled and defined. (4 total)	0	5	10	15	20
Questions at the end of the article are answered thoroughly and correctly.	0	5	10	15	20