

# Annotating

Annotating is a method of marking the important parts of a text to aid in memory and recall. It assumes that writing should be approached as a conversation between the writer and reader. The author's half of the dialogue is already written, but it is up to the readers to take an active part in understanding the text and responding. Annotating forces readers to notice main ideas and draw conclusions that a cursory reading could miss. The visual notes both organize and reinforce the main ideas of a text. Annotating improves concentration during reading and consequently improves comprehension. Additionally, annotating prepares readers for written responses, helps readers locate citations later, and provides an outline for reviewing before an exam.

## Annotating Tools:

There are two basic kinds of annotation: graphic and written. Graphic (such as underlining and circling) provides visual diagrams or marks to emphasize words and phrases or, even better, show the relationship between words and ideas. Graphic annotation is most effectively used with written annotation (the reader's notes and comments).

### Graphic

- Highlight Passages—Draw a bracket next to a passage to signify its importance.
- Mark Repetitions—Circle or underline repetitions of key words to show emphasis or central ideas.
- Underline—Underline only the most important phrases or quotations. Do this to emphasize important statements.
- Symbols—Place a graphic symbol next to other annotations to represent the relationship between words and ideas and to portray the meaning of your annotations.

### Written

- Comments—In the margins, make editorial comments, write down thoughts that the text inspired, and point out the structure of the argument.
- Cross Reference—Mark the page number of a similar passage or section that lends insight to another one.
- Index—On a separate piece of paper, create an index of major themes or ideas in the text. Each time you mark something, write the page number down for an easy reference.
- Signpost—Take note of the major divisions in the argument and summarize these main points in the margin. Also, note significant repetitions, recurring themes, etc.
- Summarize—Write a brief summary of the article or chapter. Generally, this should be at the beginning or end.
- Write Questions—Ask questions about the text or structure of the argument. Look for logical fallacies and implications.

## Annotating Techniques:

Each reader develops her own annotating techniques. Use a specific symbol to signify a certain meaning. Much like a map requires a legend to interpret its symbols, each reader must have a key to his annotation symbols. Also when annotating, it is important to observe the following guidelines:

1. Underline the Right Amount of Information—If you underline too much, you will take too long to reread all the information when you review which will de-emphasize the importance of the passage.
2. Develop a Consistent Annotating Style—Be consistent in your annotation system so that you will know the meaning of your annotations. For example, decide whether you will only mark main ideas or if you will include details as well. Do you underline or mark new terminology definitions, and how will you differentiate between them and other information you have annotated in the paragraph? Ask yourself these and other stylistic questions to set your annotating style.
3. Annotate Accurately—Make sure that your annotations accurately represent the text's main ideas. If you annotate too fast or read too superficially, you may overlook main ideas, miss crucial statements, or misjudge the significance of ideas in the argument.

The following is an annotating sample:

Thesis: To be honest with God and yourself, you must follow your inner feelings instead of society's expectations.

Purposes: ④ Twain establishes honest morals in the character Huck and sets Huck up as a model to the readers.  
⑤ Huck overcomes conflict with society's expectations and discovers his morals.

- ① Pray to be better
- ② Can't pray
- ③ Recognize problem hypocrisy
- ④ Rising internal struggle

... ① I about made up my mind to pray; and see if I couldn't try [to quit being his goal to meet society's expectations the kind of boy I was, and be better.] So I kneeled down. ② But the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? ③ It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from me, neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. ④ It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting on to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth say I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was, but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie—and He knowed it. ⑤ You can't pray a lie—I found that out.

Him = presence of God

establish virtue

honesty

Conflict

⑤ Concludes he must be honest with God + self and follow his heart.

(The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain)

Figure 1 Key to Annotating Symbols

<u>                    </u>	= important phrases	~~~~~	= main ideas
[                    ]	= important descriptions	notes in right margin	= editorial comments
○	= key repetition	numbers + left margin	= logic development / structure
[	= important passage	top margin	= thesis and purpose