Annotating Textbooks

Annotating is a way of marking your textbook as you locate key points. In addition to highlighting or underlining, you should also annotate because it can help you understand and remember information. Publishers often include wide margins in college textbooks to encourage students to annotate.

Just underlining or highlighting can limit your learning because they can be done without thinking very actively. However, annotating requires more active thinking. When you annotate, you’re not only reading; you’re already beginning to study the material. This is why annotating is more effective.

Why else should you annotate?

1. **Annotating increases your concentration.** It forces you to think about and clarify the writer’s ideas.

2. **Annotating makes you a more active reader.** Your mind can’t wander as much so you’ll remain more focused.

3. **Annotating encourages you to distinguish between the main ideas and supporting details.** Differentiating between key concepts and supporting details helps you better understand the key concepts.

4. **Annotating helps you remember important information.** When you rephrase material in your own words, you’re putting it into your long-term memory.

5. **Annotating helps you monitor your learning.** It forces you to select, reflect, and evaluate what you’re reading.

6. **Annotating allows quick review of important ideas.** When you look through your textbooks, you’ll be able to quickly identify important information. This helps you study for exams, participate in class discussions, and write papers.

7. **Annotating provides reference material for future classes.** It’s easy to refer back to information already learned when you need it for writing papers or preparing presentations.

8. **Annotating makes it easier to locate information during an open-book test.**

How do you annotate?

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

Permission to duplicate this material was granted by Ms. Sharon Green, Coordinator of the Office of Academic Support, Niagara University.