

A Guide to Annotating Text

Before you begin reading:

- 1) Find a comfortable and quiet, distraction-free setting in which to do your reading.
- 2) Have a fresh highlighter and a pen or pencil available.
- 3) Make sure you have sufficient light for reading.
- 4) Turn off or silence your cell phone to avoid interruptions. Do not read with the tv on.

As you read:

- 1) Highlighting and annotating can be done in many ways, so you should develop your own system that works best for you.
- 2) One option would be to use a yellow or orange highlighter to note specific passages or sentences that stand out to you as you read. You might highlight key information about a character or the plot; or you might highlight writing you find extraordinary or significant.
- 3) You might highlight names of characters the first time they are introduced, or significant events; or you could use a pen to underline them.
- 4) Highlighting appears *within* the text; annotating appears on top of (circling or underlining) or in the margins of the text.
- 5) Highlighting indicates significant information.
- 6) Annotating and highlighting should be extensive and should appear on most pages of the text.
- 7) Annotating is like note-taking, but it can also be used to express your reactions to the text—you could even annotate to engage in a conversation with the author or a character. You might put a star in the margin, for example, to indicate a passage you really enjoy.

For reflection:

- 1) The purpose of annotating and highlighting is to make the experience of the text your own personal, meaningful experience. No one else will highlight or annotate exactly what you will.
- 2) Another purpose of annotating and highlighting is to provide you with important information you might use for writing about the text. If you have highlighted things that you think are significant or meaningful (or beautiful or ugly) you won't have to skim or reread the entire text to locate this information again.
- 3) If you are interested in a particular character or theme, keep that in mind as you read and highlight and annotate when meaningful information about that character or theme appears. This could be very helpful when you begin to write about the text.

Music and reading: It is not possible for the human brain to simultaneously process two streams of linguistic information at the same time. For example, you can't pay attention to dialogue in a movie and read a book at the same time and expect to understand either one. Therefore, if you want to listen to music while you read, listen to instrumental-only music. Music with lyrics will compete with the words you are reading and cancel out your ability to comprehend what you're reading. The instrumental music of composer Brian Eno is especially good background music for reading (e.g., his work "Music for Airports").