

## ANNOTATION GUIDELINES

Reading critically calls for you to analyze a text as you read, developing your ability to make connections between ideas in the text and between these ideas and your own. When you are reading for the purpose of understanding, annotating a text—writing your notes, ideas, and questions on the text itself—can help you read more thoughtfully and save time in the long run.

You should write on the text neatly enough that you can read your notes but not so neatly that it interferes with your reading. Experiment with different annotation techniques to find a system that works for you. You do not have to use every annotation technique you learn; just use a few techniques to help you "converse" with the text.

Here are some suggestions for annotating your reading:

- ***Underline the thesis (main idea) and major points of the text.*** Underlining the main idea and major points will help you understand and recall the author's purpose in writing the text.
- ***Summarize the main point of each paragraph or section of the text with a phrase, sentence, or diagram in the margin.*** When you read or refer back to a text, you will be able to remember the argumentative or narrative development without having to reread the entire text. You will also be able to locate more easily specific points that you may want to find later.
- ***Use different colored highlighters or pencils to highlight major arguments or ideas.*** Using different colors can be a useful way to quickly organize information that belongs to a specific argument or theme.
- ***Draw lines and arrows to show important connections in the text.*** Graphic representations can help you analyze and remember the relationship between ideas in the text.
- ***Use symbols (\*, •, ✓, ✕, →, etc.) to mark important points in the text.*** Marking can help you remember the key points in the author's argument or the ideas that most interest you. You may also want to use different symbols to mark different groups of related ideas.
- ***List and/or number important points that are related as ordered parts of a process.*** For example, an author's argument may have four points that must be followed in a certain order to be logical. Number these points in the margin.
- ***Circle keywords that are unfamiliar and write down their definitions.*** Circling and defining keywords can help you remember the meaning and usage of important words both in the text at hand and in your future reading and writing.
- ***Record with a keyword or phrase your own ideas about the content or writing style.*** In other words, don't lose any good thoughts running through your head when you read because you didn't take time to catch those thoughts on the text. These ideas may lead you to topics or argumentative points for future writing of your own.
- ***Ask yourself thought provoking questions in the margins.*** Pinpointing the questions to which you want to find the answers can help you discover your own views.

See Chapter 2, "Critical Thinking, Reading, & Viewing" in *The New Century Handbook* for additional information on annotating texts and other critical reading skills. Examples of student annotated texts can be found in this book.