

Marking and Annotating the Text

Marking and annotating the text is an active reading strategy that requires students to think critically as they read. This procedure provides tools for understanding complex and rigorous texts. It is a fundamental strategy that requires you to isolate text to which you can refer later for use in discussions and writing assignments. Five components are foundational to this strategy:

1. Numbering the paragraphs
2. Circling key terms
3. Underlining information relevant to the reading purpose
4. Identifying the gist of the reading selection
5. Writing questions about the content of the selection

These five steps provide the process of writing commentary, notes, and questions on a text to aid in comprehension. A reader who annotates is actively involved in the reading process, for this activity becomes a form of dialogue between the reader and the text.

Marking the Text

It is always a good idea to begin a reading task with an “essential question” in mind. This question is often provided by the instructor to guide students as they read and prompt them to interact with the text. Students should also consider why the text is being read in order to compose an essential question in the event that the instructor does not provide it. Write this “essential question” just before the first paragraph of the text.

Before you read, take a moment to number the paragraphs in the section you are about to read. Start with the number one and continue numbering sequentially until you reach the end of the text or reading assignment. Paragraph numbers will act as a reference so you can easily refer to a specific section of the text.

As you read, circle key terms, cited sources, and other essential words, phrases, and numbers.

Underline the author’s claim and/or other information relevant to the reading purpose. While reading informational texts, focus on identifying information relevant to the reading task. This might include:

- Central claims
- Evidence
- Details relating to a theology, philosophy, or ideology
- Facts about a person, place, thing, or idea
- Descriptions of a person, place, thing, or idea
- Cause and effect relationships

Annotating the Text

As you read and mark each paragraph or “chunk” of the text, consider the gist of what you have read and questions you have about what you have read or questions you know your instructor will ask about the content of the text. Write a word or phrase in the right margin indicating the gist or summary of the paragraph or “chunk”. Write questions about the content of the paragraph in the left margin. Include any further notes in the margins that will help you process what you have read. The answers to questions you have written in the left margin should be marked in the text unless they are lingering questions you have after reading the paragraph or “chunk”. If the answers to these lingering questions do not appear in the successive paragraphs of the text, you should bring them up for discussion in class.

After you have annotated all paragraphs or “chunks” of the text, write a short summary of the content of the piece in the margin or in your notes. This summary should not exceed three to five lines, and it should summarize the content of the reading selection and include no personal reflection or commentary. The summary is typically written after reading, marking, and annotating an entire reading selection/assignment and is not inserted after the first chunk of a reading selection as has been done for the purpose of illustrating the entire process in this presentation.

Repeat the first four steps of the process for each paragraph/chunk of a reading selection, and compose the summary after you have completed the reading process and reviewed the marks and annotations you made as you read.

If you have additional marking and/or annotating steps or adaptations of the steps provided in this presentation, continue to use them if they help you read critically and interact with what you are reading. For additional resources on marking and annotating a text, refer to “Section 6” of *AVID Postsecondary Strategies for Success* and “Section 1” of *AVID Postsecondary Academic Reading and Writing Guide*. Both texts are readily available in the First-Year Experience Office on campus.