

Annotating an Essay or Short Story

Annotation involves highlighting or preferably underlining key points and circling unknown vocabulary words. But equally important is writing comments in the margin of the text. These comments/labels help you make connections to the reading and provide an excellent short cut for reviewing the key points of the essay in order to compose your own written response or prepare for a test or quiz on the reading.

Annotation steps:

- Underline, highlight, or circle main ideas, key points, important vocabulary, important dates and names, etc.
- Add your own comments in the margins of the text. These comments may serve any of the following purposes (or you might have ideas of your own)
 - Label the type of material the paragraph covered, for example, “Childhood years,” “Examples of Edison’s inventions,” “Causes of extinction.”
 - Label the organization, for example, “Introduction,” “First main idea,” and “Background information.”
 - Add your own personal reactions and connections. As you read, you will be reminded of similar events that have happened in your own life, issues you have read in other classes, or things you have seen in the media. You might write, “My experience with accident,” “Like Native American story in sociology,” or “Chilean coal miners.”
 - Ask questions about issues you don’t understand in the text or new questions that occur to you. These questions provide ideas for research.
 - Argue if you don’t agree with the writer or the essay. You might write, “No! Not my experience, or “Author has never had a blue collar job--he doesn’t know!” These arguments may provide a spring-board for your own writing.