

Campus Academic Resource Program

How to Annotate

This handout will:

- Define annotating and explain its importance.
- Provide strategies for annotating.
- Provide an example of an annotated article.
- Provide an activity for practicing annotating.

The Importance of Annotating

Annotating is a reading comprehension strategy that involves marking up the actual text to *highlight key points, summarize main ideas, ask questions, and make connections*. Annotating is different than **note taking**, which generally involves writing down important points from the text on a separate piece of paper. Annotating can improve your reading comprehension by creating an increased engagement with the text. When you respond to a text through annotating, you establish a dialogue that will lead to a deeper understanding of what you are reading. Unlike note taking, annotating records your initial impressions of a text, which can be a useful tool during review.

How to Annotate

The following tips will help you to prepare for annotating:

- Have a pencil, pen, and highlighter ready. Using different types of writing utensils/colors will help you organize your annotations and will make review easier.
- You may also use word processing tools to annotate an electronic text. Consider whether electronic or paper texts will be easier for you to annotate.
- If you are annotating a text that you cannot mark up, use post-its.
- Consider your purpose for annotating. Are you reading for general understanding? Are you looking for rhetorical techniques? Are you reading to learn something specific? Knowing your purpose will help you to focus on key aspects of the text.

Once you have the proper tools and know your purpose for annotating, you are ready to begin.

Consider using the following strategies while annotating:

- *Write brief summaries.*
 - Summarizing what you have read will help you to clarify the main ideas and draw your attention to points you find confusing.
- *Paraphrase important ideas.*
 - Paraphrasing main points or complicated ideas will help to break down the text and make it easier for you to understand. Putting an idea in your own words will help you to be more comfortable discussing it.
- *List or number ideas (steps, processes, cause and effect).*
 - Writing abbreviated versions of steps/processes and causes and effects in the margins will help you to review these points while studying.
- *Highlight or underline key ideas and concepts.*
 - Highlighting or underlining key ideas and concepts will make it easier to refer back to them in the text and will help to focus your studying. Be careful to use highlighting or underlining sparingly so that you do not end up with a majority of the text marked.
- *Make predictions.*
 - Making predictions helps to increase your engagement with the text by bringing in your own critical thinking. This strategy is especially useful with literature because it records your first impressions. Since you can only have one first reading of a text, annotations can be essential to preserve your initial thoughts.

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- *Write definitions of unknown words.*
 - If you come across an unknown word, look up its definition and write it in the margin. The best way to learn new words is through context, and writing the definition down will make you more likely to remember it.
- *Ask questions.*
 - Asking questions about a text can remind you of places you need to come back to during review. During class discussion, asking questions about a text is also a great way to engage with the professor and other students.
- *Make connections.*
 - If you read something that reminds you of another source or class, make a note of it. Making connections between readings and courses is a great way to build your knowledge base and can also make for interesting contributions during class discussion.
- *Draw pictures for visual connections.*
 - If you are a visual learner, try drawing pictures to make sense of a text. This could be a great strategy if a text is describing a complicated image or if an image is central to your understanding of a text.
- *Develop a system of symbols.*
 - While annotations should be thorough, they should also be efficient. A great way to save time while annotating is to develop your own system of symbols to denote specific kinds of notes or reactions. For example, you might use an exclamation mark to denote sections that are surprising, or an asterisk to denote sections that are important. The specific symbols you use are arbitrary; what is important is that you know what the symbols mean and that they are helpful to you. You might make a key to remind you of what each symbol means.

Example of an Annotated Article

The following annotated article shows examples of underlining, labeling main ideas, and summarizing.

"How Come the Quantum" By John Archibald Wheeler

	Bold = Main Ideas	Universal Font = Descriptive Outline	<i>Italics = Comments</i>
intro of topic		What is the greatest mystery in physics today? Different physicists have different answers. My candidate for greatest mystery is a question now century old, <u>"How come the quantum?"</u> What is this thing, the "quantum"? It's a bundle of energy,	Greatest mystery in physics is nature of quantum.
historical perspective		an indivisible unit that can be sliced no more. Max Planck showed us a hundred years ago that light is emitted not in a smooth, steady flow, but in quanta. Then physicists found quantum jumps of energy, the quantum of electric charge and more. In the small-scale world, everything is lumpy.	<i>lumps of energy?</i>
description		And more than just lumpy. When events are examined closely enough, uncertainty prevails; cause and effect become disconnected. Change occurs in little explosions in which matter is created and destroyed, in which chance guides what happens, in which <u>waves are particles and particles are waves</u> .	chance plays great role in change in this "small scale world" <i>This means they're the same and different at the same time?</i>
main idea of essay		<u>Despite all this uncertainty, quantum physics is both a practical tool and the basis of our understanding of much of the physical world.</u> It has explained the structure of atoms and molecules, the thermonuclear burning that lights the stars, the <u>behavior</u> of semiconductors and superconductors, the radioactivity that heats the earth, and the comings and goings of particles from neutrinos to quarks.	quantum physics has helped us understand material world <i>both what things are and how they work</i>

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Practice Annotating

Using the strategies in this handout, practice annotating the following passage. You may also practice annotating a text from one of your courses.

26 Language Standardization

Einar Haugen

The taxonomy of linguistic description – that is, the identification and enumeration of languages – is greatly hampered by the ambiguities and obscurities attaching to the terms ‘language’ and ‘dialect.’ Laymen naturally assume that these terms, which are both popular and scientific in their use, refer to actual entities that are clearly distinguishable and therefore enumerable. A typical question asked of the linguist is: ‘How many languages are there in the world?’ Or: ‘How many dialects are there in this country?’

The simple truth is that there is no answer to these questions, or at least none that will stand up to closer scrutiny. Aside from the fact that a great many, perhaps most, languages and dialects have not yet been adequately studied and described, it is inherent in the very terms themselves that no answer can be given. They represent a simple dichotomy in a situation that is almost infinitely complex. Hence they have come to be used to distinguish phenomena in several different dimensions, with resultant confusion and overlapping. The use of these terms has imposed a division in what is often a continuum, giving what appears to be a neat opposition when in fact the edges are extremely ragged and uncertain. Do Americans and Englishmen speak dialects of English, or do only Americans speak dialect, or is American perhaps a separate language? Linguists do not hesitate to refer to the French language as a dialect of Romance. This kind of overlapping is uncomfortable, but most linguists have accepted it as a practical device, while recognizing, with Bloomfield, ‘the purely relative nature of the distinction’ (1933: 54). . . .

[Here Haugen discusses the French and Classical Greek usages which gave rise to the current usage of the English terms ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ – *Eds.*]

Due to various historical processes, the two terms are cyclically applicable, with ‘language’ always the superordinate and ‘dialect’ the subordinate term. This is also clear from the kind of formal structures into which they can be placed: ‘X is a dialect of language Y,’ or ‘Y has the dialects X and Z’ (never, for example, ‘Y is a language of dialect X’). ‘Language’ as the superordinate term can be used without reference to

Source: ‘Dialect, Language, Nation’, *American Anthropologist*, 68, 6 (1966), pp. 922–35, reprinted in Dil, A. S. (ed. and intro.) (1972) *The Ecology of Language: Essays by Einar Haugen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press) pp. 237–54.

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Sample Annotations

* = important concept
R = concept to review for test
? = concept to clarify in class

26 Language Standardization

Einar Haugen

taxonomy = a classification into ordered categories

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? What are some basic differences between these terms?

dichotomy = division into two parts

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? Why are some languages and dialects more studied than others?

There seems to be disagreement between linguists about these concepts.

[Here Haugen discusses the French and Classical Greek usages which gave rise to the current usage of the English terms 'language' and 'dialect' – Eds.] Due to various historical processes, the two terms are cyclically applicable, with 'language' always the superordinate and 'dialect' the subordinate term. This is also clear from the kind of formal structures into which they can be placed: 'X is a dialect of language Y,' or 'Y has the dialects X and Z' (never, for example, 'Y is a language of dialect X'). 'Language' as the superordinate term can be used without reference to

R
Why is this overlapping uncomfortable?

There can be a dialect of a language, but not a language of a dialect.

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superordinate = of higher degree in condition or rank
vs.
subordinate = placed in or belonging to a lower order or rank

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