

Annotation

Annotation: Hard, Strong, and Weak Lines

(Brought to you by the English Department at LPC)

Annotation

Simply defined, an annotation is a note or comment. The act of annotating a text is making comments in the margins or within the text of your reading. What lines you choose to annotate, and what comments you choose to make, will often depend on the purpose you have for reading the text.

Your purposes for reading a text in an academic setting might include learning about a topic, preparing for tests, and preparing to write a paper (in addition to personal growth and enjoyment).

Underlining in combination with Annotation

Underlining words or sentences helps you identify important sections to return to later. However, it's difficult to remember the reason you underlined a part of a text when you skim through the reading a second time. Annotation will help you identify different types of lines that suit different purposes. It will also help you engage in active reading.

Annotation and Active Reading

When you annotate a text, you start a dialogue with the author. You might be asking a question in the margins: "What are you saying?" or "Where is your proof?" You might be responding with your own experiences: "So true!" or "My friends, too!" Your interaction with the text helps you pay more attention to the reading and adds your own perspective. You are actively considering the meaning of the text and its implications. This active reading will not only help you understand a text, but it will help you generate your own ideas.

Strong, Hard, and Weak Lines

While you're reading, you might not have time to write long annotations in the margins. Instead, you can make quick annotations to review later. Using the following shorthand can help you identify lines that are important, difficult, or unconvincing.

Strong Lines (!)

Hard Lines (?)

Weak Lines (X)

Strong Lines (!): In the margin of your text, write an exclamation point next to any important, well-written, or interesting lines that illuminate the ideas or fulfill one of your purposes for reading. It's sometimes helpful to have a little more information to remind you why you considered a line "strong." Here are some example annotations with additional information:

Me too! Good Pt! Wow! Love this! Quote! Main idea! Beautiful! Imp Term! Test! Quest 1! Use! Like Plato! U.S. Const! See Glucose! Paper!

Notice that these terms or phrases only need to make sense to you and your purposes, not necessarily to others.

Hard Lines (?):

These are lines that are difficult to understand. Try re-reading them, and if you still have trouble, write a question mark next to them in the margin. Then move on. When you're done with the chapter, go back to the hard lines and try to figure them out by breaking them up into parts or using the context of the sentences around them. You might also use an online posting area to discuss the meaning of such lines, or bring them up in an in-class discussion.

Finding out what these lines mean, and how to get meaning from them, will improve your reading ability. Often, the most important ideas in a text are the hardest to understand because they present new concepts or sophisticated ideas. In other cases, you might simply need to look up a vocabulary word. Here are a few example "hard line" annotations:
Vocab.? Huh? Who said this? Who cares? Yikes? Help? What Potato?

Weak Lines (X): Use an "X" next to lines that are *not* true to your life experience or knowledge, or for an idea that you would like to challenge. It's a good idea to use one or two words that remind you of what differs in your experience, like "X, Jennifer and Matt," which means remember how Jennifer and Matt's example differs from what the text says. Here are some other examples:

Not true X No proof X Not me X Not in Congress X Bush Didn't X

Customize: You might choose a custom shorthand to meet your own reading needs. For example, imagine you know that you will need to write about the psychological insights made by the author throughout the book; you might choose to write **PSY** every time you read a psychological insight. If you are reading a biology text and you have been assigned a project that entails comparing cell structures, you might use the shorthand annotation of **Struct** every time you read a relevant line.

Sometimes, you discover your purpose for reading while you are reading—you discover a topic that interests you, such as symbolism, and you create your own short hand at that time, like **SYMB**.

Returning to Your Annotations: You might also put an asterisk in the top corner of every page that has a line you might use later so that you can skim through the book more quickly. A great way to work through important ideas, have them stick in your head, or generate your own material is to write more in a journal after the reading, referring to your annotated lines.

Now complete the attached annotation assignment.

Annotation Assignment

Name _____

Instructor _____

In-class assignment: Use a text assigned by your instructor for the following assignment.

Read the text silently or together as a class. As you read, annotate the text using strong, hard, and weak lines. Imagine that you will need to write a paper or take a test on the text in which you will have to summarize its important ideas, respond with your own ideas or experiences, and connect it to issues you've learned. Annotate lines that will help you be successful with your goals.

Afterward, discuss your choices with the class or in small groups. Explain your reasons for choosing the lines that you annotated, keeping in mind your goals as a reader. Also answer the following questions: Are there lines that are more frequently chosen than others? If so, which ones and why? If there are hard lines or words, can your peers help you figure out what they mean? What strategies helped figure out hard lines? If there are weak lines, what makes them weak and how do they differ from your perspective and experience? Would the annotations help you fulfill the purposes you have for reading the text? What annotations did the instructor make?

On a separate sheet of paper (or the back of this page), freewrite for one page about the lines you chose to annotate and the experience of practicing annotation. Why did you choose the lines you did? What ideas did it help you generate? What was the relationship between your annotations and actively reading? How was your annotation different from or similar to others? What did you find helpful and why? How did it go? Did it go as you'd expected? If not, how was it different? What will you take away from this experience for future readings and annotation in this class and others?