

Active Reading and Textmarking (Level One: Study Skills)

Marking Your Text: Some Practical Considerations

Active readers are effective readers. Textmarking (i.e. marginal notes, highlighting) will focus your attention and keep you on task as you read. It will also improve your reading speed and comprehension.

Textmarking helps simplify review as well. The process of marking your text isolates the main points of the reading material, enabling you to retrieve them more easily and retain them more effectively.

General Suggestions:

1. Keep your system simple! If you do not, you will probably abandon textmarking altogether.
2. Be consistent!
3. Be neat and brief!

Marginal Notes:

Textmarking methods which require writing (e.g. summary notes, critical annotations) are most effective: they require the most participation on the part of the reader. Notes may summarize, interpret or evaluate text. Effective reader's often use an approach which incorporates a combination of notes types. No matter what type of note you decide to make, remember to be neat, brief, consistent, and use your own words whenever possible.

1. *Summary notes* condense the main idea of the text. The purpose of summary notes in expository text is to clearly separate the main points from the details: in narrative text, they capsule the main elements of the story.
2. Thesis notes go one step beyond summary notes. They attempt to address the question "What point is the author trying to communicate about this main idea?"
3. *Critical annotations* ask "So what?" or "What does this mean to me?" of the text. This type of note will probably help you understand and retain the greatest amount of knowledge. Not only do critical annotations require that you summarize and interpret text material; they ask you to evaluate text as well.

Use of Abbreviations and Symbols:

An important key to efficient textmarking is to use abbreviations whenever possible. The type of note you are making will determine the type of abbreviation you will decide to use. The following suggestions are only a place to start. Experiment with abbreviations and symbols to find out which things work most effectively for you, and then stick with them.

1. Commonly used words and phrases should be abbreviated with whatever works for you: words, symbols, pictures, etc. For example:

Especially – esp.	greater/less than – > <
Psychology – $\Psi\Psi$	demand/supply – D S
Oxygen – O ₂	education – ed.

2. The same goes for noting your level of understanding of or agreement/disagreement with text. For example:

Confused about this – ?	no comment ☹
Relates to – \cup	surprising – !!
Agree with – yes! 😊	Disagree with – no! ☹

3. Relative importance of facts may be marked with stars; much like a general's rank is designated in the military. For example:

* -- a point to pay attention to
*** -- a point you intend to remember
***** -- a point you cannot forget (a five-star general)

Highlighting

Ineffective as it tends to be, highlighting remains the textmarking preference of many students. If text is highlighted, it should be done in two steps. Here's how:

1. *As you read*, use a non-permanent method to mark the points you feel are important (e.g., pencil dots at the end of each line of text that explains a major idea)
2. *After you read*, skim the text you marked during the first reading. Judge the importance of each portion of marked text relative to the entire selection. If you still feel that a given portion of marked text is a major concept at this point, highlight it.