

How to read (part one)
Or
How to do Annotations

All of you know that taking notes in class and on what you read is an important study skill, but many of us either haven't had to take notes consistently. I'm here to tell you that at some point in your academic career taking great notes is going to become essential to your success. The following set of instructions is meant to give you one method for taking effective electronic notes on the texts that you've read.

At this point you interrupt me, saying, "That's okay Mr. Lister, I'll just write in the margins of my books in college and highlight the important stuff."

"Yes, but you can't write in the books I am giving you."

"True, but I can put sticky notes to mark important pages."

"Yes, but if you're really reading closely your book will look like a porcupine on a bad hair day."

"But this is how I've always done it in the past and it works for me."

"Great, but highlighters and sticky notes are hard to organize and can't help you write great papers more efficiently. Moreover, you can't share these kinds of notes or compare them in any meaningful way with either your teacher or your study buddies. So, try it my way for now and see if it doesn't completely change the way you read and understand texts."

So how do we take these "annotations"?

A. Get Organized:

1. On your computer dedicate a file to all information you'll have on a given text.
2. Create a document that has a plain text name that indicates the date (semester or specific Date) in which you are studying the text in question, indicate the name of the text and the content of the file.
3. Always put a proper Bibliographical reference at the beginning of any series of notes so that you know what book you are working with. Different editions may vary wildly and can cause problems later

File: Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury fall 08 (Mr.Lister)

Document name and title: 9.9.08 Fahrenheit 451 Annotations 3-20

*On Sept 9, 2008 I studied F. 451 and read and annotated pp. 3-20

Bibliographical info:

Bradbury, Raymond. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Del Ray, 1991.

*If you have a question about how to do MLA works cited, please see

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/> (or)

<http://www.easybib.com/>

B. Locate your quotes (Oops, I mean location your quotations. Oh, well, you get the point)

Locate points in the text that you find particularly interesting, confusing, or points that you think are fundamentally important to an understanding of the text. Think of the text being knotted, tangled, and that for it to really "mean" you have to untie it.:

C. Format your individual annotations properly.

1. Give page number and indicate which text it is
2. Accurately quote the piece of text in question
3. Ask a question you would like answered or make the observation that prompted you to choose the quote.

(1) Frankenstein “I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man.” –R. Walton to Mrs. Saville.

How important must this sense of exploration and glory be to be included on the first page? And who is this Walton character anyway?

This preceding is an example of a one of your smaller annotations. As the class continues, it is my hope that you’ll eventually begin to answer the questions you’ve posed in insightful analytical original writings.

Example: Robert Walton’s quest for glory is written in stilted difficult language. The reader knows that he is self-educated and therefore must assume that his preoccupation with the glory of exploration—like his use of big words—is fueled by a sense of self-loathing. He inflates his language and his self-importance to stabilize an identity that lacks more traditional anchors. The really odd thing in this piece of writing is that this self-important posture is directed at his sister, a person with whom he should be completely comfortable, a person who should be able to immediately see through the smoke and mirrors.

B. Vocabulary.

1. Vocabulary works best when you locate the words for yourself. We all have different linguistic abilities and learning to improve our own vocabularies is a necessary life skill.
2. Note the date, book, and page number of the word in question just like an annotation
3. Write the word in question.
4. Write enough of the context of the word in question to give you a possible meaning.
5. Write your best possible definition based on Context.
6. Check your definition with a dictionary and write the dictionary that best fits the current meaning.
7. Write a personal definition that is in your own words.

Example:

(1) Frankenstein, Eccentricities - “I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming **eccentricities** consistent forever.”

Context def. - fluctuation, malleability, changeability

Dictionary def. –1. The quality of being eccentric; deviation from the normal, expected or established.

Personal def. – the qualities that seem different from the normal and that seem to change for no reason.

On computer annotations it would be a good idea to include a bibliography of the edition of the book you used.