

## Text Marking and Highlighting

### Why highlight

Text marking helps you to focus and concentrate while reading. When highlighting, you are selecting, organizing, and thinking about the importance of what you are reading. This can improve overall reading efficiency by facilitating a greater understanding of information the first time that it is encountered. Text marking is also important because it decreases the time it takes to read for important information when reviewing for tests or exams. You can just reread and review the highlighted text.

### Know your purpose

Before you begin, preview the assigned task so that you understand what kind of learning is expected. There are differences between reading a science textbook to retain information and prepare for a test, reading a literary novel to participate in a class discussion, and doing secondary reading for a research paper. Knowing your purpose will give you a better sense of what type of information to look for before you start reading so that you can highlight and annotate your texts more purposefully. Do you need to learn key terms and definitions? Are you looking for literary themes and images? Are you looking for evidence to support an argument?

### What to mark

It is a good idea to employ a regular system for highlighting or text marking; this way you know what you need to do with the marked information during review sessions. For example, you may want to:

- use any headings, bold print, italics, and labels to determine the important ideas in a passage (see handout on “How to Remember What You Read”)
- circle all unknown words so that you know you need to look them up; write the definitions in the margin
- highlight definitions and put "def" in the margin so that you know you need to study this important definition
- number a list or series of events (this will help you remember them)
- put question marks in the margin to remind yourself that you need to get clarification from the professor or TA.

Equally important, text marking also involves writing in the margins of your text. Writing comments, summing up information, noting disagreements and similarities, and posing questions allow you to think about the material at an even higher level of understanding.

### When to mark text

In order to think adequately about the information, text marking should ideally be done after a paragraph or section has been read. It is difficult to evaluate the importance of information on the first read, and it is common to highlight phrases of an idea only to find that the idea is put even more succinctly in a subsequent line. Reading a paragraph first will prevent you from highlighting large sections of text that might seem important at first glance.

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# Reading

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## How much to underline

A good rule of thumb is to underline no more than 25% of the text. Instead of underlining entire sentences, underline key words or phrases, examples, and/or supporting details. If you underline or highlight too much information, you will be unable to isolate important details during subsequent review sessions.

**Ex:**

Def { According to social psychologists, there is a cognitive bias that is referred to as the primacy effect, a bias that overemphasizes the importance of first

Cause { impressions. This is generally assumed to be because people are especially attentive during introductions.

**Ex:**

Marketing research has shown that during the adoption process, there can be five different consumer personality types: <sup>1</sup>innovators, <sup>2</sup>early adopters, <sup>3</sup>early majority adopters, <sup>4</sup>late majority adopters, and <sup>5</sup>laggards. } 5 types

## Sources

Martin, D.G. (1991). *Psychology: Principles and Applications*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.

McWhorter, K.T. (2006). *Study and critical thinking skills in college* (6th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman.