

A TEACHING TIP FROM THE SENATE PDI COMMITTEE

TO GET YOUR STUDENTS OFF TO A GOOD START READING IN YOUR COURSE: SHOW THEM HOW TO ANNOTATE AS THEY READ

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ANNOTATE?

- To annotate a text means literally to make notes as you read – not just underline, not just highlight, but also physically make notes in the margin to indicate the importance or usefulness of different pieces of information and their relevance to the reading task at hand.

WHY DO STUDENTS NOT ANNOTATE?

- 18 years of being told not to mark in the school textbooks was probably a disincentive
- By the time they got to the college level we assumed they had reading skills, such as annotation, which they either had not been taught or had not been allowed to practice on school-owned texts.

HOW WILL IT HELP THEM?

- Cognitive learning theory and reading research shows that the more readers interact with the text – which means looking for specific answers to questions, reflecting on what they are reading, linking new information with old information, determining organization, the more they will understand and remember what they read
- Ask them what they do now – the most common answer is to just read the material and reread if necessary – not very efficient, and often ineffective, since they are still not sorting out the important stuff

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A COLLEGE INSTRUCTOR?

- Be sure that the students are very clear about their objectives in reading selections
- Within the first few weeks, work through a brief reading selection, and show them how you would annotate, or mark up the text in response to a particular objective.
- Modeling works best on an overhead – do it together; don't just underline, but make notes in the margin about why you underlined; show them how to analyze chunks and not necessarily whole sentences. You don't have to be perfect; the key is the interaction, the physical involvement with the pen or pencil, the thinking about how the material is organized.
- Require them to mark up a reading selection, bearing in mind what you want them to focus on in terms of your instruction. If your class is small enough, walk around and look at what they are doing, offering suggestions.
- From time to time in the semester, remind them to keep annotating, reinforce how much it helps them