



# Annotating Text

## Overview

**Rationale for Change Idea:** Annotations are a form of personal notetaking in that they indicate what readers have found important or confusing. Readers revisit their annotations as they think about the text and prepare for discussion, writing, or future reading.

The change idea introduces a strategy—**annotating text**—that helps readers focus on what they are reading and keep track of what they are thinking.

**Annotating text** is one form of notetaking—one that is done on the actual text that is being read. When well done, annotations track students’ reading in a way that can be more efficient than notetaking.

**Caveat:** Students need to learn to use the strategy **in moderation** and not “bleed” all over the text. There is no standard annotation protocol. Marginal notes, question marks or explanation points, underlining, notes to “see also” are all good, as are emojis and other symbols or drawings to show sections of text they like (😊), dislike (😞), appreciate (!!!!), or do not understand (????), etc.

## Connection to Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Goals and Priorities

Understandings and Expectations			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>1: Planning standards-aligned content</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>4: Evidence of student learning</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>2: Equitable instruction</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>5: Collective efficacy</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>3: Student engagement</b>		<b>6: Equitable and inclusive learning environment</b>
English Language Arts Instructional Practices			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Understanding the text</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Critiquing the text</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Responding to the text</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Producing text</b>

*Note.* There are multiple ways to implement the change idea on annotating text. The ideas below for teacher preparation and implementation are just one way of thinking about this work.

Attention to Equity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on one's own biases to mitigate negative impact on curriculum selection, instruction, and relationships with students, families, and colleagues. (U6)*	<input type="checkbox"/> Emphasize assets, resilience, joy, and resistance of historically marginalized groups to provide a more comprehensive representation of their lived experiences. (U6)
<input type="checkbox"/> Use culturally relevant and sustaining approaches across grade levels and content areas for all students, with a critical eye toward serving those from historically marginalized groups. (U1, U2)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sustain students' cultural, linguistic, and literate practices while providing instruction that promotes flexibility in their ability to navigate different cultures and contexts. (U1, U2, U3, U6)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Position students for success as knowledge producers rather than consumers. (U1, U2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Use perspective-taking to develop an understanding of the factors that influence varied points of view. (U2, U3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Draw on students' interests and culture to shape curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (U1, U6)	<input type="checkbox"/> Question the single story/status quo that sustains societal inequities. (U2)
<input type="checkbox"/> Use language to discuss asset-based approaches to teaching and learning. (U6)	<input type="checkbox"/> Center the experiences, voices, histories, perspectives, and dignity of Native People and People of Color. (U6)
<input type="checkbox"/> Foster a nurturing and collaborative learning community where students seek feedback from teachers and peers, assess their own learning, and set goals. (U3, U4)	

\*LBUSD Understandings Continuum

**Who Benefits:** All students, especially when they remember to check their annotation to assist in **their comprehension**.

### When Used and Why?

**Before reading**, students may use their annotations as a way to review previous reading before starting a new assignment.

**During reading**, to make note of ("annotate") key points and ideas, highlight words and terms that are unfamiliar, add personal comments or questions, provide brief summaries, point out places that remind them of their own lives or previous learning, or indicate where they are confused or where they agree or disagree with the author.

*Coaches should remind teachers that disagreeing with an author is sometimes a sign of real comprehension.*

**After reading**, to refresh their memories about what they have read, what was confusing, or what may need to be referenced quickly for later use, for example, when participating in a classroom discussion or when writing about what they have read.

## Annotation for Use in Social Studies and Language Arts

The actual strategies that students will use to annotate social studies and language arts material are basically the same, but it is teachers' responsibility to teach students key components of each subject:

Specific text structures in each subject, for example:

Chronological order or point/counterpoint, etc., in social studies

Key figures in historical context

Major characters in a story, play, or other piece of literature

Development of characters, theme, setting, or plot in novels

Rhyme patterns in poetry, etc. in English language arts

Unfamiliar rhetorical devices

Aspects of text that relate directly to what is being taught, for example, causes for political unrest among the colonists in Massachusetts or ways in which an author shows a character's personality)

### Time Required:

Making initial annotation **should not add much time to students' silent reading process.**

The process encourages students to read more slowly as they make decisions about what to annotate.

After reading, students consult their annotations during discussion, follow-up writing assignments, or before additional reading.

## Guidelines for Coaches: Introducing the "Annotation"

### Change Idea

#### Why the Change Idea Is important: Explaining the Change Ideas to Teachers

Annotating text improves students' learning from what they read by **slowing down their reading process** because they

focus more closely on what they are reading;  
sort through details to find the most important aspects of text (e.g., dates, names, facts) that need to be noted and remembered;  
keep physical track of aspects of text that they may want to come back to later, for example, to look up the meaning of words;  
note important aspects of text that they think they will need to remember, for example, dates or names;  
mark aspects of text that they will want to check in other sources, for example, author claims they would want to confirm or dispute or information that contradicts their own experiences; and  
highlight and track how their reactions to what they read and how the text is making them feel.

Ask teachers to think about the 😊 or 😞 in the margins of something they themselves have read!

Annotations provide students with signposts in the text that will help them review and remember what they have read or identify aspects of text they want to think about or discuss. The process should take students less time than taking more formal notes because they are doing it as they read, without having to move between reading material and notepaper.

Teachers can tell their students that their annotations will be “**reminders of past reading for readers’ future forgetful selves.**”<sup>1</sup>

## Preparing for Implementing the Change Idea With Students

### Teacher Preparation to Introduce Annotation

**Select a text** for annotation: Finding the right piece of text to introduce the strategy is essential: It should be challenging enough for students to elicit authentic self-questioning and annotation but accessible conceptually to the students.

Select an authentic piece of content area text—something students are likely to read for class.

Find appropriate selections of texts that are complex enough that students would need to slow down to do a close read or double check and/or that contains information they will need to do further work.

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<sup>1</sup> This term comes from Chapter 11 in *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics* (Liljedahl, 2020), which discusses annotations as one form of notetaking.

Read through the text and **determine an explicit purpose** for reading connected to unit and lesson goals that will guide the annotation work that students will do, for example, preparing for a classroom debate or dramatizing a short story.

Elicit from teachers a list of features that students might annotate, including

unfamiliar vocabulary,

dates and events,

key figures or characters,

key information presented in a graphic format,

causes and effects or details that are clearly stated (explicit) and support the author's claims or advance a storyline, and

aspects of the author's craft, for example, language use, vocabulary, and rhetorical style.

**Identify the specific points** in content area texts where you will model the annotation process for students.

(Coaching note) If time allows, let teachers annotate a short piece of text and compare their results.

**Prepare how to explain** the annotation process to students, for example:

It is a way to mark up texts ("annotate" them) to show what is important and what might need to be consulted later.

Create a list of features that might be annotated, including

unfamiliar vocabulary,

dates and events,

key figures or characters,

key information presented in a graphic format,

causes and effects or details that are clearly stated (explicit) and support the author's claims or advance a storyline, and

aspects of the author's craft, for example, language use, vocabulary, and rhetorical style.

### ***Sample Teacher Implementation Routine***

Introduce the text and set a purpose for the reading.

Explain the annotation process (see options above).

Read text aloud as students follow along and model the process by verbalizing their thinking, their questions about the text, and their reasons for making specific annotations.

Remind students of the purpose for annotating text.

Give students a short sample of content area text on which to practice annotation.

Provide the appropriate level of **support** (see coaching handbook for guidance) as students try the strategy on their own.

Base the level of support on the complexity of the text/content and task and the students' ability to annotate as they read.

Engage students in reflecting on and discussing the text using their annotations. Some options to consider once students have completed the assigned reading are to

have students talk with a partner about what they annotated and why,

have various partnerships share sections of text that they annotated along with why they made those annotations, and

have student groups or pairs respond to content-specific questions and encourage students to refer to and then cite their annotations as evidence.

## Assessing the Change Idea

**Students' overall comprehension should improve** when they learn to annotate text and use the annotations as reminders for what they have read. Some examples of how students show improved comprehension using annotation are that they

ask questions about what they have not understood;

look up confusing vocabulary or concepts in order to better understand;

participate more readily in class discussions, especially by referring specifically to what they have read; and

refer to their annotations as they participate in discussions or as they write in response to reading.

They may bring up aspects of texts that do not correspond to their prior reading or their personal/cultural experiences.

**Teacher self-assessment/discussion questions:** Reflect on how the annotation activity went in your classes today as you consider the following questions:

Did students who annotated text seem to understand **what the class was learning about** today?

What proportion of the class seemed to understand?

Did students who annotated text seem to understand the text they were reading today?

What proportion of students seemed to understand?

Did students who annotated text seem to feel comfortable sharing their thinking today in class (e.g., offered ideas, disagreed with a classmate)?

Did students use their annotations as they took part in **classroom discussion**?

What percentage of the students used annotation in discussion?

Overall, how many students seemed to be using the critical reading skills that have been modeled for them?

What challenges did students seem to have in understanding how to make annotations? How might you address these challenges next time you implement this activity?

What seemed to work well for students in the way annotation was introduced, modeled, and structured for students to engage using annotation?

It would be helpful to log some responses to these reflection questions in your implementation tracker. (These questions can be discussion points during coaching in addition to the general implementation questions in the coaches' handbook)

Rubric for teacher evaluation of student written work			
4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Adequate	1 – Not satisfactory
Annotations contain questions, observations, and connections to the text.	Text has been annotated with some questions, observations, and connections to the text.,but they are somewhat random.	Text may be highlighted, but there is a lack of written notes in the margins and an imbalance of notes throughout the text.	There is little to no evidence of an effort to annotate the text.
Challenging words and concepts are marked; interesting and surprising parts are noted.	Some challenging words and concepts are marked; a few interesting parts are noted.	Very few words and concepts are marked; few interesting and surprising parts are noted.	There is no understanding of the text demonstrated through marking or making notes on the text.
Students consistently refer to the text in talking and writing using their annotations.	Students often refer to the text in talking and writing using their annotations.	Students sometimes refer to the text in talking and writing using their annotations.	Students never refer to the text in talking and writing using their annotations.

## (Optional) Discussion Rubrics for Teacher Evaluation Implementation of “Annotation” Change Idea

Optional Rubric for Coaches to Use With Teachers in Discussion (Not a Measurement Item)			
Teacher assessment	Possible student responses <sup>a</sup>		
Students annotated their texts thoughtfully, that is, with an appropriate—and not excessive—number of annotations.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who annotated text understood <b>what the class was learning about</b> today.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students knew how to use annotations effectively, that is, to highlight the most important aspects of text or where they had questions.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who made annotations understood the text they were reading today.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students seemed to be using the critical reading skills that have been modeled for them.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
If students did not understand the text they read today, they used their annotations to help them comprehend.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who made annotations seemed to feel comfortable sharing their thinking today in class (e.g., offered ideas, disagreed with each other, elaborated on each other’s comments).	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students used their annotations as they took part in <b>classroom discussion</b> .	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students used their annotations in completing <b>today’s writing assignment</b> about what they have been reading and discussing or as they participated in today’s discussion.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50% <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> To the extent possible, estimate the percentage of students who fall into the “< 50%” category and note those who may need extra help or reteaching.



Optional: Rubric for Student Self-Evaluation in Social Studies and Language Arts: Annotations			
Student statement	Possible student responses <sup>a</sup>		
I understood <b>what we were learning about</b> today.	Yes	No	Sort of
Annotating helped me understand the text we were reading today.	Yes	No	Sort of
Annotating helped me prepare for our class discussion or writing assignment.	Yes	No	Sort of
When I didn't understand the text we read today, I annotated the sections I need to figure it out (either on my own or with help).	Yes	No	Sort of

<sup>a</sup> Select “sort of” to indicate “to some extent” or “somewhat but not as much as I’d like or need to.”

**Assessment:** Determine how, when, and why students annotate—not just if they do. Do the annotations identify confusing aspects of text and aspects that they need to remember for future use? Teachers can use a rubric to record students’ use of annotations in general, as well as the effectiveness of their use of this strategy.

Rubric for Teacher Evaluation of Students’ Use of Annotations			
Teacher assessment	Possible student responses <sup>a</sup>		
Students understood how to use annotations to support their comprehension—that is, not too many and not too few.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students referred to their annotations as they reviewed their reading assignments, for example, as they engaged in class discussion or in writing assignments.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who used annotation understood the text they were reading today more than those who did not use the strategy.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%

<sup>a</sup> To the extent possible, estimate the percentage of students who fall into the “< 50%” category and note those who may need extra help or reteaching.

Asking students to complete a rubric about their annotations can also serve as a way to assess strategy use.

Rubric for Student Self-Evaluation of the Annotation Strategy			
Student statement	Possible student responses <sup>a</sup>		
I understand how annotating text can help me comprehend what I read.	Yes	No	Sort of

Rubric for Student Self-Evaluation of the Annotation Strategy			
Student statement	Possible student responses <sup>a</sup>		
The annotations I made in today's reading will help me remember what I read.	Yes	No	Sort of
I will likely review the annotations I made today for class discussion or writing assignments or to get ready for another reading assignment.	Yes	No	Sort of

<sup>a</sup> Select "sort of" to indicate "to some extent" or "somewhat but not as much as I'd like or need to."

