Annotating is a way of marking your textbook as you locate key points. You might already highlight or underline but you should also annotate because it can help you understand and remember information. Publishers often include wide margins in college textbooks so students can annotate.

Just underlining or highlighting can limit your learning because they can be done without thinking too actively. However, annotating requires more active thinking. When you annotate, you’re not only reading; you’re already beginning to study the material. This is why annotating is more effective.

Why else should you annotate?

1. **Annotating increases your concentration.** It forces you to think about and clarify the writer's ideas.
2. **Annotating makes you a more active reader.** Your mind can't wander as much so you’ll remain more focused.
3. **Annotating encourages you to distinguish between the main ideas and supporting details.** Differentiating between key concepts and supporting details helps you better understand the key concepts.
4. **Annotating helps you remember important information.** When you rephrase material in your own words, you’re putting it into your long-term memory.
5. **Annotating helps you monitor your learning.** It forces you to select, reflect, and evaluate what you’re reading.
6. **Annotating allows quick review of important ideas.** When you look through your textbooks, you’ll be able to quickly identify important information. This helps you study for tests, participate in class discussions, and write papers.
7. **Annotating provides reference material for future classes.** It’s easy to refer back to information already learned when you need it for writing papers or preparing presentations.
8. **Annotating makes it easier to locate information during an open-book test.**

How do you annotate?

1. **Always read with a pen in hand.**
2. **Annotate what's most important:**
   - Main ideas (summarize stated main ideas; try to write out implied main ideas)
   - Definitions (indicate with “dfn” in the margin)
   - Examples (indicate with “ex” in the margin)
   - Lists of reason or characteristics (number them; perhaps also summarize each one)
   - Concepts that show cause and effect relationships, or similarities and differences (use arrows to show the connections)
   - Summary statements (paraphrase in the margin and circle)
   - Unfamiliar words (put a box around them, or underline with a red pen)
   - Signal words (circle them)
3. **Annotate one section at a time.** Survey the section first, and then read all the information under the heading. Then determine what’s important to write in the margin.

4. **Annotate before you underline or highlight.** This will reduce the amount you’ll need to underline or highlight.

5. **Annotate in your own words,** using as few words as possible. Don’t just copy. Think about what you’re reading, and accurately paraphrase it. This helps you monitor your learning. If you can’t write the information in your own words, then you probably don’t understand it.

6. **Turn headings into questions.** When you find the answer to your question, place parentheses around the answer and write “imp” in the margin.

7. **Number items in a list.** Write out a brief heading for that list.

8. Put ? to indicate information that you don’t understand.

9. Put ⇔ next to information that may be important (but you’re not sure)

10. **Mark important ideas** with * or “imp” in the margin.

11. **Use numbers for lists and sequences.**

12. Put “T” next to items that are likely to be on the test.

13. Put “SUM” next to a summary statement

14. **Use abbreviations and symbols.** Develop a personalized marking system that’s meaningful to you.

15. Write comments in the margins to help you connect the material with instructor comments and your own experience.

16. **Re-read** any parts that you did not understand.
Here are some examples of annotations of passages from *Through the Global Lens: An Introduction to the Social Sciences* (2nd ed.) by Michael J. Strada, the SSC 100 textbook:

**for examples:**

“Science believes that things are not always what they seem to be, rendering commonsensical understanding inadequate. Common sensory perception alone may suggest to us that the earth is flat, that the sun revolves around the earth, that heavy bodies always fall faster than lighter bodies, and that ships made of iron must head to the bottom of the sea. Yet humanity has long known all these expectations to be false.” (Ch. 2, p. 44)

**for definitions:**

“Science gathers facts that help to answer the *what* type of questions. When facts are organized, they can be more abstractly analyzed to answer the complicated *why* type of questions. These general explanations of specific factual realities are known as *scientific theories*.” (Ch. 2, p. 45)

**for main idea:**

“The father of classical economic theory is the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790). His enormously influential book, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), argued that government should keep its hand off the economy…” (Ch. 2, p. 41)

**for unclear passages:**

“Journalist Thomas Friedman sees homogenization that is unsympathetic to local lifestyles as a better explanation for the backlash against globalization than resistance to change” (Ch. 2, p. 41)

**for important passages:**

“The limited, or finite, character of natural resources is a reality that humans have not easily accepted. … Especially in big countries like the United States, Russia, and Brazil, wasteful human stewardship over the land has remained commonplace.” (Ch. 1, p. 14)

**to show relationships:**

“The United States acts as a symbolic leader of the world’s democracies and prides itself on foreign policies blending idealism with realism. We say that we try to do the right thing ecologically. Yet on occasion, the United States has been branded by our closest allies (the Europeans, Canadians, and Japanese) as malingerers. In the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the United States found itself isolated when it refused to sign the biodiversity agreement approved by nearly everyone else.” (Ch. 4, p. 93)

**for a possible test question:**

“The globalization of military threat concerning nuclear weapons is known as the *proliferation* problem. Thus far only nine countries have produced nuclear weapons (five declared, three undeclared, one dismantled), and efforts to halt nuclear proliferation attempt to keep others from following suit.” (Ch. 1, p. 18)

**for a summary:**

“Looking back over the last 4,000 years, we can map a geographic *statement*: progression of power. Starting from Egypt in the Middle Ages, moving to Greece and Rome in Southern Europe, then settling in Western Europe over the last 500 years, centers of power have exhibited a spatial migration. For the last 350 years of Eurocentric power, the state has been the dominant actor on the world stage. Among the factors contributing to state power, a variety of geographic conditions serve as the foundation. Climate, location, natural resources, size, and topography all figure into the power equation.” (Ch. 3, p. 61)

(This handout is adapted from one written by Judy Roller of American River College in Sacramento, California.)
Here is an example of how to annotate a passage from *Sociology: A Down-to-Earth Approach* (8th ed.) by James M. Henslin (p. 210). This textbook is used in SOC 101. Notice that the annotating is done in conjunction with highlighting, but the highlighting is minimal. If you annotate accurately, you won’t need to highlight entire sentences.

**Four Deviant Paths.** The remaining four responses, which are deviant, represent reaction to strain. Let’s look at each one. Innovators are people who accept the goals of society but use illegitimate means to try to reach them. Crack dealers, for instance, accept the goal of achieving wealth but they reject the legitimate avenues for doing so. Other examples are embezzlers, robbers, and con artists.

The second deviant path is taken by people who become discouraged and give up on achieving cultural goals. Yet they still cling to conventional rules of conduct. Merton called this response ritualism. Although ritualists have given up on getting ahead at work, they survive by following the rules of their job. Teachers whose idealism is shattered (who are said to suffer from “burnout”), for example, remain in the classroom, where they teach without enthusiasm. Their response is considered deviant because they cling to the job even though they have abandoned the goal, which may have been to stimulate young minds or to make the world a better place.

People who choose the third deviant path, retreatism, reject both the cultural goals and the institutionalized means of achieving them. Those who drop out of the pursuit of success by way of alcohol or drugs are retreatists. Although their withdrawal takes a much different form, women who enter a convent are also retreatists.

The final type of deviant response is rebellion. Convinced that their society is corrupt, rebels, like retreatists, reject both society’s goals and its institutionalized means. Unlike retreatists, however, they seek to give society new goals. Revolutionaries are the most committed type of rebels.

**IN SUM** Strain theory underscores the sociological principle that deviants are the product of society. Mainstream social values (cultural goals and institutionalized means to reach those goals) can produce strain (frustration, dissatisfaction). People who feel this strain are more likely than others to take the deviant (nonconforming) paths summarized in Table 8.1.