Annotating

Annotating is an important skill to employ if you want to read critically. Successful critical readers read with a pencil in their hand, making notes in the text as they read. Instead of reading passively, they create an active relationship with what they are reading by "talking back" to the text in its margins. You may want to make the following annotations as you read:

**Mark the Thesis and Main Points of the Piece**

Mark the thesis and main points of the piece. The thesis is the main idea or claim of the text, and relates to the author's purpose for writing. Marking the thesis and main points will help you understand the overall idea of the text, and the way the author has chosen to develop her or his thesis through the main points s/he has chosen.

**Mark Key Terms and Unfamiliar Words**

While you are annotating the text you are reading, be sure to circle unfamiliar words and take the time to look them up in the dictionary. Making meaning of some discussions in texts depends on your understanding of pivotal words. You should also annotate key terms that keep popping up in your reading. The fact that the author uses key terms to signal important and/or recurring ideas means that you should have a firm grasp of what they mean.

**Underline Important Ideas and Memorable Images**

You will want to underline important ideas and memorable images so that you can go back to the piece and find them easily. Marking these things will also help you relate to the author's position in the piece more readily. Writers may try to signal important ideas with the use of descriptive language or images, and they may draw attention to a key concept the writer is trying to convey.

**Write Your Questions and/or Comments in the Margins of the Piece**

Writing your own questions and responses to the text in its margins may be the most important aspect of annotating. "Talking back" to the text is an important meaning-making activity for critical readers. Think about what thoughts and feelings the text arouses in you. Do you agree or disagree with what the author is saying? Are you confused by a certain section of the text? Write your reactions to the reading in the margins of the text itself so you can refer to it again easily. This will not only make your reading more active and memorable, but it may be material you can use in your own writing later on.

**Write any Personal Experience Related to the Piece**

Comparing your own experiences with a text can make it more relatable. It can also give you a means of “talking back” if your experiences are similar or different from those described or assumed in the text.
Mark Confusing Parts of the Piece, or Sections that Warrant a Reread

Don’t skip difficult or confusing parts of the text. Make note of them so you can raise your questions in class or with a tutor.

Underline the Sources, if any, the Author has Used

This strategy will be particularly important in CW102 when you begin to read source materials for research papers. Good critical readers are always aware of the sources an author uses in her or his text. You should mark sources in the text and ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the source relevant? In other words, does the source work to support what the author is trying to say?
- Is the source credible? What is his or her reputation? Is the source authoritative? What is the source's bias on the issue? What is the source's political and/or personal stance on the issue?
- Is the source current? Is there new information that refutes what the source is asserting? Is the writer of the text using source material that is outdated?