

Reading in Paideia: An Illustrated Guide To Annotating Your Text

As you move through Paideia this year, you'll find that you're presented with wide variety of reading situations. Not only will you be reading material from across the disciplines, but you'll also be reading works written during different time periods. Combined with the reading you'll be doing in your other classes, you will be presented with the opportunity and challenge to develop new reading processes that help you not only retain but also engage with the material you've been assigned.

Learning to write as you read will help you deepen your engagement with a text -- whether that writing happens as marginal notes, reading notes that you keep in a separate notebook, or short writing assignments that your instructor assigns in class. You'll likely find that the writing you do also increases your ability to be in conversation with the texts you're reading and your confidence to take your own position.

Below are a few examples of habits that have proven helpful for your Paideia professors, along with some images of what their notes look like. As a reader, you'll have to develop your own system, one that is sustainable and one that reflects your style of note taking. It will take some practice. Your professors have spent years honing their systems. Hopefully these examples will give you some new approaches to try.



But, I plan to sell my books back. I can't mark in them, right?

Actually, per JoAnn Uhlenhake, the textbook buyer in the Luther College Bookshop, books can be sold back to the bookstore with a reasonable amount of underlining and marginal notes: "Buyers will only refuse, or perhaps offer less, if the book is damaged either with missing or ripped pages, water damage and highlighting so excessive that is difficult for the next person to use."

But, what if I've rented my textbooks?

The same 'rules' apply to rented books. "Even if we rent a new book, we expect to get a 'used' book back when they are finished using it," JoAnn explains.

Rather than worrying about writing in your books, make sure to avoid coffee spills. According to JoAnn, water/liquid damage is what most often keeps students from getting money back for their books.

A Guided Start: Using the Paideia Reader

This process of annotating as I read is new to me. Where can I begin, especially with a Paideia text that is giving me some difficulty?

Friday, October 30
• Darwin, Charles. "Excerpts from Chs. IV, VI, XIV," *On the Origin of Species* (Reader 54-70)

5. What is natural selection and how does it work to the advantage of some members of a species and not others? How does the length of time and the way in which natural selection works compare to the work of domestication that humans undertake? Why does Darwin argue that nature selects only the "good" for each species? *Compare to domestication*
6. What is sexual selection and how does it compare to natural selection in the creation of species? What different roles does Darwin attribute to males and females in the process of sexual selection? What do you think about these ideas? *↳ what are the roles*
7. What does Darwin mean by the term coadaptation? How does this explain relationships between different species of plants and animals and their natural environments? How is coadaptation related to natural and sexual selection? *↳ what is the relationship*
8. How does Darwin's metaphor of life being like the branches of a tree or bush challenge biblical explanations of the creation of life? What does it imply about the way in which different species relate to each other? *↳ relate to bible*

The *Paideia Reader* is a tool that will help provide you with some focus and direction as you read. While not all instructors draw directly from the reader questions each day in class, the questions highlight important moments and ideas in the text that you should plan to keep an eye out for. Gwen Van Gerpen, director of the Student Academic Support Center and an instructor of General Studies 110, suggests previewing the *Reader* questions prior to beginning your reading. See if you can distill a keyword or phrase from the question; write that word or phrase in the margin of your reader or on a sticky note that you can use as a bookmark.

As you read, identify and mark passages that fit each question's main idea.

A simple way to begin annotating might be to list the question number in the margin and then add a note about what the text is showing you where a given keyword or theme is concerned. Keep in mind that this method is *not* about searching for a single correct answer in the text, Prof. Van Gerpen explains. Rather, it is a way to help you to keep yourself on guard for particular moments or events as you read.

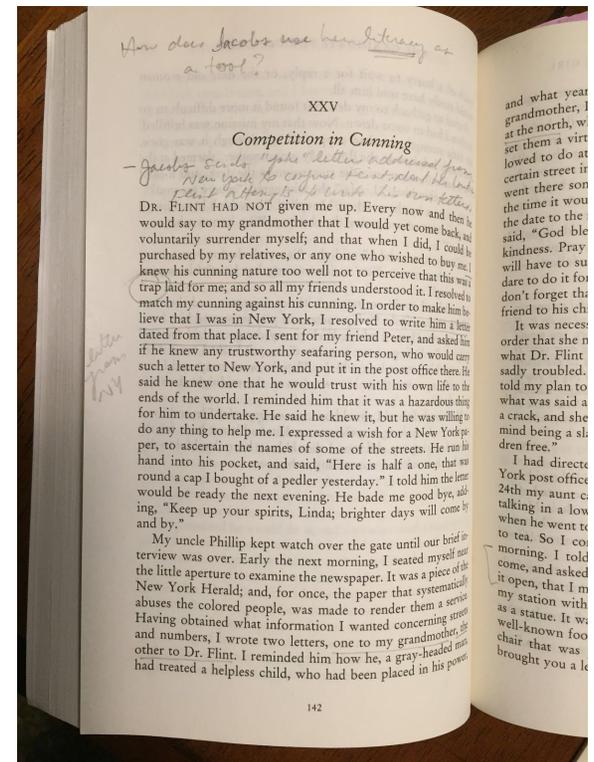
[See an extended sample of taking Reader guided notes.](#)

The "What Happened" Approach: Summarizing As You Go

There seems to be a lot going on in this text. How can I use notes to follow the action?

Tracking the action in a text can give you a good idea of where to begin jotting down notes. For Marie Drews, Assistant Professor of English, writing summary notes and questions in the white space at the beginnings or endings of chapters is a common practice. "Especially when I am reading a text for the first time, it's useful for me to write down phrases and sentences that capture what happened in a given chapter after I've finished reading it. Having these notes available makes it easy to remind myself where certain events take place in a book. If I step away from the text for a bit, reviewing my summary statements helps me get back in the action. And, these notes also give me a jumping off point to jot down questions regarding a major idea or problem that might be playing out in a given chapter."

[See a larger image of Prof. Drews' notes here.](#)



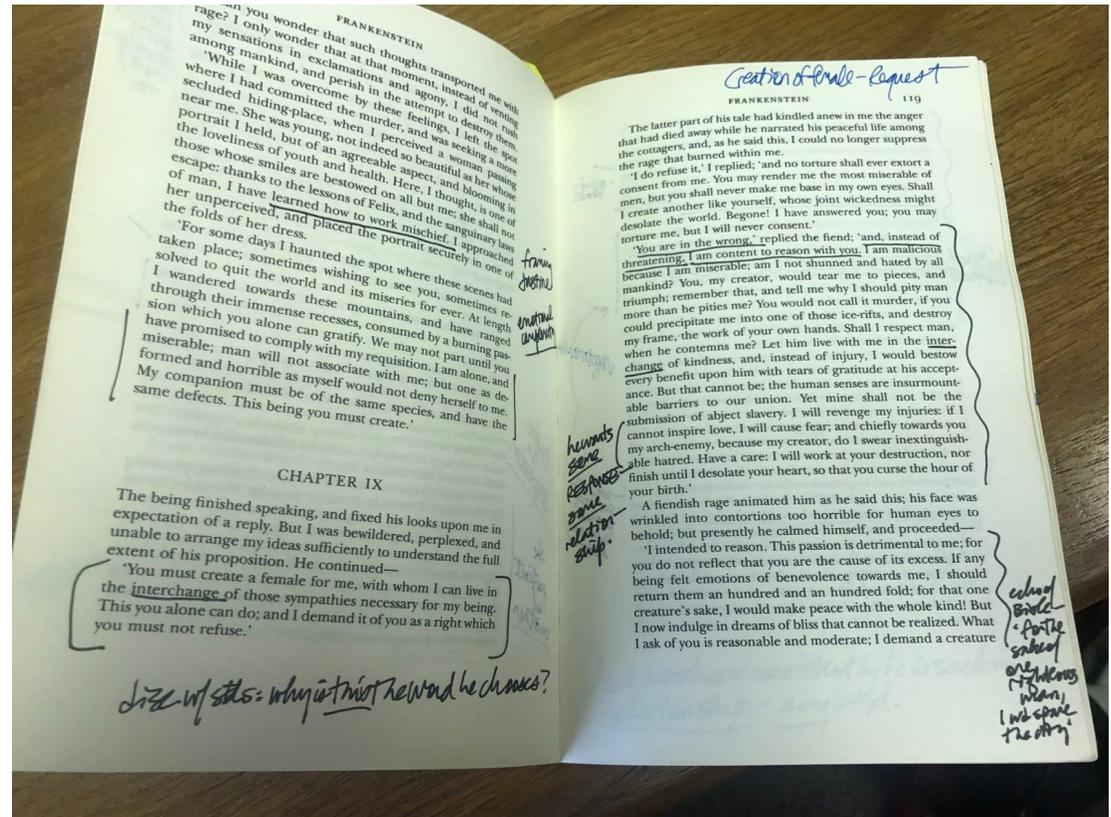
Adding in What “I Say”: Taking Descriptive and Evaluative Notes

I'm getting in the hang of writing as I read. How can I develop my process further?

Amy Weldon, Associate Professor of English, has two different types of notes that she takes as she reads. Prof. Weldon writes, “When I mark a text while reading, I'm thinking of what I will need or want to remember later, and I'm thinking of the fact that I retain visual memories of notes on pages (or stars, or underlinings) that help me flip through the text and find those later.”

“Basically, I make two kinds of marks,” Prof. Weldon explains:

1. **Descriptive:** I write at the top of the page a literal description of something important whose location I want to remember: "First conversation with Creature," "Definition of 'Armenian,'" "first sight of Turkey." This will help me find that passage quickly when I flip back through. I also make careful note of passages we talked about in class: I tell students that if it's on the board, it needs to be in your text/underlining/notes.
2. **Evaluative / Creative:** I underline, write comments about, and otherwise flag a spot where my own attention spikes: "This reminds me of..." "This makes me think about..." "This harkens back to that other place on p. 31 where she talks about this..." "If I were writing a paper on a broader issue within this text, this is a passage I would use," "We talked about this in class and so I want to remember where it is and think about it some more.



[See a larger image of Prof. Weldon's notes here.](#)

What Do “They Say”?: Tracking the Argument

What new strategies can I practice when reading argumentative writing?

“A prolific note-taker.” That’s how Todd Pedlar, Associate Professor of Physics, refers to himself. “I find that taking notes really helps me both comprehend and summarize the ideas I'm reading about and the elements of the essay or story that is before me. The act of actually writing on and around the text, I find, helps me remember points made and where they're made in the work itself, and to crystalize my own thoughts about the work.” When reading argumentative essays and articles, Prof. Pedlar suggests that observing the following elements “guides” him as he’s underlining and remarking on what he’s read in the margins:

- **The Central Question:** Indications of the question that the author seeks to explore: What is the central question being asked?
- **Context-setting statements:** Where does the author set up the question and the parameters for its exploration? Are there caveats included, or boundary markers within which the answer the author offers are limited?
- **What’s the They Say?:** Is there offered a specific “they say” to which the author is responding? In scientific texts this is often a theoretical approach that is being tested, but in some cases it may be a previous conclusion to a similar question, as is the case with Darwin here.
- **Evidence:** Always want to seek and make note of evidence given in support of the answer that the author gives the reader.
- **Evaluating Evidence:** Drawing conclusions about the author's use of evidence - or filling in between things that the author is saying to help me further understand their argument.”

“Whatever I'm reading, I also need to circle back once I've read an essay (or short story, or novel) -- and oftentimes I find that having digested the whole, I need to go back and restate or revise (or augment) things that I've put in the margin before. This helps me wrap my brain around the whole of the argument (or the whole of the narrative in the case of fiction).”

[See a larger version of Prof. Pedlar’s notes here.](#)

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life.*

Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

“But with regard to the material world, we can at least go so far as this—we can perceive that events are brought about not by insulated interpositions of Divine power, exerted in each particular case, but by the establishment of general laws.”

—W. Whewell: Bridgewater Treatise.

“To conclude, therefore, let no man out of a weak conceit of sobriety, or an ill-applied moderation, think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God’s word, or in the book of God’s works; divinity or philosophy; but rather let men endeavour an endless progress or proficience in both.”

—Bacon: Advancement of Learning.

Down, Bromley, Kent,
October 1st, 1859.

“Introduction”

When on board H.M.S. “Beagle,” as naturalist, I was much struck with certain facts in the distribution of the inhabitants of South America, and in the geological relations of the present to the past inhabitants of that continent. These facts seemed to me to throw some light on the origin of species—that mystery of mysteries, as it has been called by one of our greatest philosophers. On my return home, it occurred to me, in 1837, that something might perhaps be made out on this question by patiently accumulating and reflecting on all sorts of facts which could possibly have any bearing on it. After five years’ work I allowed myself to speculate on the subject, and drew up some short notes; these I enlarged in 1844 into a sketch of the conclusions, which then seemed to me probable: from that period to the present day I have steadily pursued the same object ... I have been urged to publish this ... as Mr. Wallace, who is now studying the natural history of the Malay archipelago, has arrived at almost exactly the same general conclusion that I have on the origin of species...

In considering the origin of species, it is quite conceivable that a naturalist, reflecting on the mutual affinities of organic beings, on their embryological relations, their geographical distribution, geological succession, and other such facts, might come to the conclusion that each species had not been independently created, but had descended, like varieties, from other species. Nevertheless, such a

* HERE DARWIN OPENS WITH A DISCUSSION OF A “THEY SAY” TO WHICH HE IS RESPONDING. IT’S QUITE NATURAL, SO HE SAYS, TO LOOK AT THE SPECIES OF PLANT & ANIMAL LIFE, AND ASSUME DIRECT SPECIAL CREATION.

CONTEXT-SETTING. WHY THESE QUOTATIONS ?

HIS DATA COLLECTED HE THEN PUNDERS IT & SEEKS MEANING IN IT.