

# Marking and Highlighting Textbooks



**AESC**  
Academic Enrichment  
& Support Center

Some students have not developed the habit of marking up their textbooks. This is probably due to the fact that high school students do not use their own books and therefore cannot mark in them. Others feel that this will decrease the resale value of the book, which is NOT the case.

Developing this skill in college, however, is necessary because of the large amount of required reading. Marking the text not only emphasizes the **important ideas**, but also is particularly helpful in **reviewing for examinations**. A well-marked page may be reviewed in less than half the time it would take to reread it or to take detailed reading notes. It is an inefficient use of time, however, to take notes on large portions of the text when the text can be marked easily. If one has a digital copy of the book, one can create digital annotations and highlighting through the Review/editing function in Word (e.g., press track changes) but the same principles below apply in digital highlighting.

## THE HIGHLIGHTING METHOD

1. Read a comprehensible "chunk" of the material first.  
Many students drag their pencils along as they read, but efficient underlining is done after reading a section and then determining the important parts of what is read.
2. Capture the author's main points.  
One of the pitfalls most students are caught in is that of assessing the importance of items from their own point of view, instead of trying to understand what the author is saying.
3. Underline only a few words or phrases that hang together to form sentences that represent the author's key ideas. These can serve as review points later on. You may add words, block out parts, change tenses, etc., to aid comprehension.
4. Edit your material.  
Organize underlined material using numbers or symbols and adding notes in the margin when appropriate. Write key words or make questions in the margin, summarize at the top or bottom, use contrasting colors for different levels of reviewing. Do anything your creative mind can come up with that helps.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR MARKING YOUR TEXTS

1. Use a VARIETY OF MARKS.

You may want to underline main idea phrases, circle important names and dates, or use brackets for an entire paragraph.

2. Write SUMMARY WORDS IN THE MARGINS.

These should be abbreviated if possible and are often helpful in reviewing for a test.

3. AVOID OVERMARKING.

Excessive marking confuses the reader and may, in extreme cases, decrease the resale value of the book. Usually just a phrase or two in an important sentence is enough. Important paragraphs can be bracketed instead of underlining every sentence.

4. REVIEW YOUR MARKINGS quickly after you finish an assignment and before you close the book. Some students take very brief notes at this point, but go back and review your markings in some manner immediately after finishing the assignment. This diminishes forgetting and leaves you with an overview of the main points of the assignment.