Annotating sources is part of active reading. When you read actively, you take notes and think critically about what you are reading. The notes you take in the margins are called *annotations*.

There are several ways to approach annotating sources. You can use symbols, notes, or highlighters – or any combination of the three! However, be sure to create a key to help you remember what the colors, symbols, and notes mean. The following example, taken from Robert G. Cromie’s 1982 article, combines symbols and notes:

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**Helpful Hint!**

Creating a key is very important! Here is the key for the example to your left:

1. Underlines indicate main points of the article.
2. Squiggly underlines indicate a reference to another source.
3. Notes refer to page numbers in the article, outside sources, and short summaries of main points in the article.

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Annotating Do's and Don’ts

1) Don’t annotate your source until you have completed a paragraph or section. You may not recognize the most important points until after you’ve read through once!

2) Do be careful not to jam too many annotations onto one page. If there is too much going on visually, it can be difficult to make sense of the information.

3) If you can’t fit everything you want to comment about onto the page without creating visual overload, do try using a pad and pen or pencil to take additional notes.

4) Do look for patterns in each source. Comment on these either in the margin or on a pad or in a word processing document. Using a computer to take notes can be very helpful!

5) Remember that, in most cases, your annotations only need to make sense to you. Don’t use abbreviations you may forget. A great way to make sure you remember them is to create an abbreviation key.

More Annotating Tips

A. If you have two copies of a source, consider annotating one and highlighting another. This will help you to focus on different aspects of the source.

B. After annotating a source, put it away for a while. When you come back to it, re-read your notes and annotations. Do they still make sense?

C. Unless you have a reason not to write on your source (library book, rented textbook, friend’s copy, etc.), don’t be afraid to add your own annotations!

D. If you can, make a copy of your source before you annotate! That way, if you make a mistake, you can easily correct it.

See these Writing Center handouts for further assistance:

- The Annotated Bibliography
- The Literature Review
- Synthesis: A Paragraph Approach

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Works Consulted
