The WRITING CENTER

Elftmann Student Success Center

A Guide On How To:

Use Highlighting

- Purpose of Highlighting
- Highlighting Textbooks
- Highlighting Research
- Things to remember
- Highlighting to study

Highlighting

Highlighting can be a very effective way to both digest and review material.

What is the purpose of highlighting?

The purpose of highlighting is to **draw attention** to important information in a text. Effective highlighting is effective because it first asks the reader to **pick out the important parts**, and then gives an effective way to **review that information later**. What those important parts exactly are is directly related to what the reader is reading for.

What is the best way to highlight in my textbook?

Technical college texts require a slower reading pace than many other reading formats. When reading textbooks, the purpose is usually to find the main idea. Use these strategies to help you find and highlight the main idea:

- Read the **bold print heading** and change it into a **question**. When you find the **answer**, highlight it.
- Read **one paragraph** and stop. Ask yourself: **What do I need to remember?** Highlight this answer.
- Highlight the **key words** that indicate the main idea. Usually, these key words **repeat** throughout the section.
- When all of the highlighted words are read alone, a **key idea** of the reading is stated.

You should be able to read only the highlighted words and the words will make sense.

- After highlighting one paragraph, think of one word – or **"bullet"** -- that **summarizes** the content and write it in the **margin**. A bullet is a single word summary written in the margin of each paragraph.
- Continue the process for each paragraph in the section.
- After highlighting the section:
  - Read the highlighted words alone. Do they make sense?
  - Read the "bullet" words you have written in the margin. Do they represent the key ideas?

What is the best way to highlight my research?

As you conduct research for a writing assignment, what you read for changes to **details** like statistics, dates, quotes, and percentages. Change your highlighting strategy to meet that purpose:

Use colors of ink to indicate different ideas

- **Yellow** – main idea cover the word in wide tip
- **Blue** – detail underline 1-3 words
- **Red** – examples

Use shapes indicate importance of ideas

- **Circle** – important understanding; "ah-ha"
- **Box** – mentioned in lecture
- **Wavy Line** – example

How can I use highlighting to study?

- Write a **summary statement** or paragraph of the key ideas.
- Use the bullet words to make a **checklist** of important ideas.
- Use the bullet words to make a **self-test** for review.
- **Recite** your highlighting or bullet notes in complete sentences without looking
- Draw attention to information in the **charts, photographs, and side-bars**.
- Review your highlighting **regularly**. This fits in easily when you have just a few minutes to spare, like as you wait for class to start or on the bus ride home.

Is there anything else I should remember when highlighting?

There are a few general rules that apply to all highlighting situations. Keep in mind that failure to follow these general rules usually makes your highlighting ineffective.

- Highlight no more than **three words** in a row.
- The highlighting feature is also effective on **electronic sources**. Popular programs like Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat offer highlighting text.
- A maximum of **1/3 of the page** should be highlighted.
- Develop your own **personal system** of highlighting, and use it **consistently**. For example, choose one color to always highlight the main idea in every reading. The pattern will be easier for your brain to follow.

Illustration of Highlighting

*The word **pixel** is derived from the phrase "picture element." A pixel is the smallest graphic element to which an image can be reduced. The atom of the digital image, so to speak. Every bitmap image, whether generated on a digital camera or digitized on a scanner, is nothing more than a collection of pixels.*

Rivard, Pete. (2006). Digital Color Correction. Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.

References

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- Wong, Linda. (2009). Essential study skills. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company

Contact Us

Teresa Milligan
studentsuccess@dunwoody.edu
612-381-3398
dunwoody.edu/studentsuccess