


Example Reading Notes: Save Time by Annotating Texts

In US academic papers, you write about authors' arguments by citing their words and analyzing their ideas. Begin this process when you read: find, note and rephrase authors' key ideas. If you follow these steps, you can avoid plagiarism and save time when writing. Compare the example Reading Notes to the **bold** words in the example Final Paper.

Reading Notes	Final Paper
<p>To us, today, it seems self-evident that the emancipation of four million slaves from bondage was a great triumph of liberty. But for a majority of white Americans in the Civil War era—until almost the end of the war—this accomplishment represented the antithesis of liberty. This majority of white Americans included most southerners and more than two-fifths of the northerners—the Democrats, who opposed emancipation to the bitter end. <u>It was the outcome of the war that transformed and expanded the concept of liberty to include abolition of slavery, and it was Lincoln who was the principal agent of this transformation.</u></p> <p>Lincoln's complaint that the world had never had a good definition of liberty was well founded. The problem is that there are too many definitions. The <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> has eight major definitions of liberty, with historical illustrations. One historian of ideas has recorded some two</p> <p style="color: green; font-style: italic;">  Changing definition of liberty </p>	<p>Lincoln also used the Emancipation Proclamation to redefine freedom in the United States. Before the Civil War, most Americans believed in negative liberty, or liberty as an absence of restriction. The Emancipation Proclamation was a form of positive liberty because the abolition of slavery was a government restriction that protected freedom and equality of African Americans. McPherson illustrates Lincoln's importance to this redefinition of liberty: "It was the outcome of the war that transformed and expanded the concept of liberty to include the abolition of slavery, and it was Lincoln who was the principle agent of the transformation" (45). Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation strengthened the authority of the Federal Government and adjusted the way Americans defined liberty.</p>

- In the Reading Notes, the student **underlines** a concluding sentence so that she can quickly find it later.
- Next, she **rephrases** the sentence: "transformed and expanded" becomes "changing," and "concept of liberty" becomes "definition of liberty."
- She **stars** (*) this idea because she predicts it will be discussed either in class or in her paper.
- In the Final Paper, she uses **synonyms** of these words to state a claim: "Lincoln also used the Emancipation Proclamation to *redefine freedom* in the United States."

- She supports this claim with the underlined sentence.
- She ends the paragraph by analyzing the quote with more synonyms of her reading notes: "Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation strengthened the authority of the Federal Government and *adjusted* the way Americans *defined liberty*."

By finding the author's argument and restating it in new words, she has already written parts of sentences. By underlining and starring an important sentence, she has made it easier to find and use evidence.

Compare one more example:

Reading Notes	Final Paper
<p>The old cliché, that the proclamation did not free a single slave because it applied only to the Confederate states where Lincoln had no power, completely misses the point. The proclamation announced a revolutionary new war aim—the overthrow of slavery by force of arms if and when Union armies conquered the South. Of course, emancipation could not be irrevocably accomplished without a constitutional amendment, so Lincoln threw his weight behind the Thirteenth Amendment, which the House passed in January 1865. In the meantime two of the border states, Maryland and</p> <p>Emancipation Proclamation changed end goal</p> <p>Emancipation and the enlistment of slaves as soldiers tremendously increased the stakes in this war, for the South as well as the North. Southerners vowed to fight "to the last ditch" before yielding to a Yankee nation that could commit such execrable deeds. Gone was any hope of an armistice or a negotiated peace so long as the Lincoln administration was in power. The alternatives were reduced starkly to southern independence on the one hand or unconditional surrender of the South on the other.</p> <p>Total War ↓ No chance of reconciling ↓ Someone has to lose</p>	<p>Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln acted in a conservative manner in his role as President and as Commander-in-Chief. Lincoln planned to do whatever it took to preserve the Union, even if it meant making concessions on the issue of slavery. McPherson asserts, "The proclamation announced a revolutionary new war aim—the overthrow of slavery by force of arms if and when the Union armies conquered the South" (34). Lincoln realized that the war had changed from a limited war to a total war. This change occurred because the war was between two separate nations, instead of one nation against rebels. The Emancipation Proclamation was the first of many revolutionary actions Lincoln took to restore the Union through his total war strategy. McPherson notes that this change from limited to total war instituted the policy of unconditional surrender (87). Lincoln became determined to destroy the South at any cost with military force until the South would inevitably be forced to surrender.</p>

- In the Reading Notes, the student circles, boxes, and underlines important points so that she can focus on them now and later.
- Next, she summarizes these points in her own way with arrows (—>): “new war aim” becomes “changed end goal,” “increased stakes” becomes “total war —> no chance of reconciling,” and “unconditional surrender” becomes “someone has to lose.”
- In the Final Paper, she cites the underlined quote to build a summarizing paragraph: “McPherson asserts, ‘The proclamation announced a revolutionary new war aim—the overthrow of slavery by force of arms if and when the Union armies conquered the South’ (34).”
- Next, she uses synonyms from her reading notes to explain the quote: “Lincoln realized that the war had *changed* from a limited war to a *total war*. This *change* occurred because the war was between two separate nations, instead of one nation against rebels.”

By underlining and drawing arrows, she has made it easier to find evidence later and remember its importance. By restating the author’s argument in new words when she reads, she can write about the quote without plagiarizing.

This student paraphrased ideas and thought of words to use while reading, which meant she had less translating and vocabulary brainstorming to do while writing. She also knew where to find possible evidence because she had underlined, starred, and circled key information. Finally, because she had paraphrased the author’s ideas when reading, she avoided plagiarism in the final paper.

Key Points to Remember:

Annotate Argument

When you read, look for an author’s argument. You want to know why the author wrote a text and what the author wants you to think. You also want to find connections to your class discussions, lectures, and other assignments.

Look again at the Reading Notes above. Notice how the student seemed to use information from near the beginning and the end of paragraphs. She also used information after an expression showing disagreement (“completely misses the point”). She

did this because in traditional, Western-style nonfiction texts, you can usually find argument by looking in the following places:

- A thesis statement at the end of the first section
- First and last sentences of paragraphs
- Sentences after cited material
- Sentences after expressions showing disagreement or conflict

You will usually ***not*** find argument in these places:

- Cited material
- Stories used as examples
- Background information, such as biographical facts

Turn Reading Notes into Your Own Sentences

- 1) Summarize/paraphrase important ideas from the reading in your own words.
- 2) Read the assignment sheet question.
- 3) Review reading notes and class notes to develop your claim statements and plan evidence.
- 4) Outline the paper, including page numbers of evidence.
- 5) Draft body paragraphs by stating your claim, introducing evidence, and analyzing the evidence.