



Annotation

If your assignment involves close reading or text analysis, annotating the text as students read can help them generate ideas for their writing.

How It Works

Offer them specific directions to help them formulate their thoughts about the text, such as “Why do you think the text emphasizes this point?” or “What major idea is presented in this paragraph?”

Choose questions that are level-appropriate but open enough for students to formulate their own thoughts.

When it’s time to begin writing an essay, ask them to refer to their annotations and choose the one **about which they have the most questions**.

Why It Works

Students tend to choose the topic for which they have the most answers, but having the most questions leads to richer essays. Since writing is always an exploration of our own thinking rather than a regurgitation of what we already know, starting with a question rather than an answer can help students to examine their ideas in the most interesting and genuinely exploratory ways. While this approach includes potential wrong paths or dead ends, it also involves the most intellectual risk-taking and therefore can lead to greater payoffs.