

Marking the Text

Teacher Reference

What is it?

Marking the text is an active reading strategy that asks students to identify information in the text that is relevant to the reading purpose. This strategy has three distinct marks: numbering paragraphs, underlining, and circling.

How do I use it?

Based on the reading purpose, students will use marking the text to identify information as they read. They will begin by numbering the paragraphs they have been asked to read. Then, as they identify information that is relevant to the reading task, they will underline or circle this information, making it easier to locate for notes or discussion.

Even though the reading purpose will determine what students mark, the types of marks should not change. A student's ability to learn and apply a reading strategy relies heavily on the consistency of the strategy. If marking the text is understood to mean any pen or pencil mark on the paper, the student will never learn how this particular strategy aids his or her comprehension of the text.

When should I use it?

A fundamental strategy, marking the text ought to be used whenever students are asked to read academic texts. When students are asked to read arguments, students should underline the author's claims and circle key terms and names of people who are essential to the argument. While reading passages from a textbook, students should underline information that pertains to the reading purpose and circle names, places, and dates that are relevant to the topic being studied.

In the beginning, encourage students to read the text one time before they go back and mark the text while they read it a second time. Eventually, students will become comfortable with this strategy and begin marking the text during their first read.

Why should I use it?

When students mark texts purposefully, they are actively engaged in meaning making. To mark texts effectively, students must evaluate an entire passage and begin to recognize and isolate the key information. Once the text is marked, students will be able to quickly reference information that pertains to the reading purpose. Students might also use their markings to assist in summary writing, to connect ideas presented within the text, or to investigate claims, evidence, or rhetorical devices. Numbering paragraphs is also essential for class discussions. Once paragraphs are numbered, students can easily direct others to those places where they have found relevant information.

Marking the Text¹

One-page Reference Guide

Number the Paragraphs

1 Before you read, take a moment and number the paragraphs in the section you are planning to read. Start with the number one and continue numbering sequentially until you reach the end of the text or reading assignment. Write the number near the paragraph indentation and circle the number; write it small enough so that you have room to write in the margin.

2 Like page numbers, paragraph numbers will act as a reference so you can easily refer to specific sections of the text.

Circle Key Terms, Names of People, Names of Places, and Dates

In order to identify a **key term**, consider if the word or phrase is...

- repeated
- defined by the author
- used to explain or represent an idea
- used in an original (unique) way
- a central concept or idea
- relevant to one's reading purpose

Underline an Author's Claims

A claim is an arguable statement or assertion made by the author. Data, facts, or other backing should support an author's assertion.² Consider the following statements:

- A claim may appear anywhere in the text (beginning, middle, or end)
- A claim may not appear explicitly in the argument, so the reader must infer it from the evidence presented in the text
- Often, an author will make several claims throughout his/ her argument
- An author may signal his/her claim, letting you know that this is his/her position

Underline Relevant Information

While reading informational texts (i.e., textbooks, reference books, etc.) read carefully to identify information that is relevant to the reading task. Relevant information might include:

- A process
- Evidence
- Definitions
- Explanations
- Descriptions
- Data/ statistics

¹ Marking the text is a strategy used by the Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies at SDSU.

² For more on this definition see Stephen E. Toulmin's, *The Uses of Argument* (11-13).

