

Two things before I start:

1. On my website, for accessibility, I have my files of my script, copy of an assignment I'll be referencing, and these slides.
2. Second, I'm going pass around these artifacts, that I'll be referencing if you want to browse through

1) Today, I'm focused on annotation, what we think it is and what it could be. In short, what I am arguing for and going to show you through some of my students work, is that annotation can be—or maybe should be—everywhere in our writing instruction. In other words, I'm going to suggest that rhetorical analysis enacted continuously through annotation should be a prominent, pervasive habit in our courses as a critical orientation toward writing and reading texts of all kinds.

2) Annotation as Background Practice—conventional views of annotation

To start this argument, I want to think about what we might conventionally assume about annotation and its uses.

- a) First, I think, of course, we tend to see it as a reading. Annotation a good study skill that students should acquire for active reading, for comprehension, for retention. So, given this association, we might in our courses instruct students to annotate texts or even teach them some ways they might do it.
- b) Also, in its relation to reading, annotation can conventionally be seen as a personal intimate or private recording of ones' own thinking and engagement with a text. Samuel Kamara, on the screen here, epitomizes this kind of view. For him, annotation is scribbles, suggestions about a reader's interior state that is possibly unintelligible to others. In this common view, annotation is thinking captured, it's FOR the reader as a kind of secret language that reflects meaning, emotion, or knowledge.
- c) Seeing annotation as private record of reading, is to also, I think, expressly NOT see annotation as writing. It's something else, engagement or thinking or understanding or meaning, at best it may be a precursor to writing. In sum then, annotation functions conventionally as a taken for granted background or underground practice, one invisible and private, and a prelude to writing about texts.
- d) But, what if annotation is writing? This question is what started my thinking about and experimenting with annotation as a more central tool. What if we used annotation, not just a trace of reading, but as writing, as social, communicative, dialogic, critical and rhetorical? What if

annotation became a method of our writing courses, the vehicle for enacting a rhetorical orientation to texts of all kinds, to every text, in and beyond our classrooms?

3) Annotation as Writing

Though our conventional views might bind reading and annotation, some compositionists have helped me see annotation as a writing practice—in particular, as a part of the process of writing and revising. For example, back in 1982, James Beck, observing that no textbooks had considered the benefits of students annotating their own writing, sees such a practice as making student writers active not passive and helping them to become more conscious of their style.

4) Annotation as Writing

Much more recently Karen LeVan and Marissa King argue for the virtues of what they call “self-annotation.” They use self-annotation across the writing process as a means to build metacognition, self-awareness, independence in revision, and facility using feedback. Self-annotation helps writers get some critical distance on their own writing, approaching it as readers.

What I appreciate about these perspectives is how they dynamically connect writing and reading, processes which are really indistinguishable but which we routinely separate in our everyday conceptions and in our classrooms. This read-write connection here—that writers annotate to reposition themselves explicitly as readers of their own writing—is where the rich potential of annotation begins.

5) Annotation Everywhere!

But how and where? How can annotation work as writing, as a read-write connector, as a method? Over this past year in my first-year courses—one focused on rhetorical concepts, information literacies, and research—I’ve experimented with stretching annotation out to everything I could. So, let me first give an overview of these ways, and then I want to zoom in on annotation in the writer’s notebook.

- a) To start, I found it important to introduce and to study annotations. I did this by at the beginning of the semester having students reading an essayist—Sam Anderson—on his obsession with annotation and his details on the histories of the practice. Students took the essay home with general instructions to annotate it. They brought it back to class and we made a big circle and passed those annotations around to one another to closely examine our own marks in relation others'—me included. The point was to examine how others marked and to discover what kinds of moments seem to precipitate marks. This observation process, which made annotation made social and an object of study, lead us to discuss the efficacies of annotating. Finally, I end by explicitly suggesting that annotating is a method for reading rhetorically or reading like a writer (something recently introduced to them essay Mike Bunn in *Writing Spaces*—highly recommend) So right from the jump, we've linked annotation, reading like a writer, rhetorical analysis, and the interconnections of reading and writing (by that I mean that we're not just passively reading, but putting ourselves in the mindset of the text's composer).
- b) From that foundation, across the course we regularly rhetorically annotate published written and visual texts of all kinds, as a group, in their writer's notebooks. This becomes routine.
- c) As a research project step, students annotate their research sources—they turn in annotated sources along with more traditional annotated bibliography type writing.
- d) Next, I talk about and enact my draft feedback as rhetorical annotation, the very same kinds of marks, I underline to my students, that we have practiced on published texts of all kinds.
- e) Finally, in their final portfolio, students rhetorically annotate their own final researched inquiry essays and their genre recast texts to demonstrate their learning in the course, including their facility with both the analysis and performance of rhetorical concepts.

6) Zoom in on the NOTEBOOK

Where I particularly found value in my annotation everywhere experiment though is in my informal writing practices. I have long had students work in a *Writer's Notebook*: there students write informal, but detailed, responses on readings, brainstorm and quickwrite in class, take their own notes, do imitation and sentence style exercises, and so on. But I've always struggled with its evaluation. In the past I had collected it and read it all and tried to award points for completion, effort, engagement with readings. But I felt, among other challenges with that assessment process, that it made the book more MINE than theirs.

7) So, I decided to this last time ask students reencounter and annotate their notebook entries before they turn their books in to me. Here is how I prompted it: I give some suggestions as to what they might look for as they reecounter their entries, instructions aligned with how we've practice annotating all along.

To explore how this worked, I want to show you some student examples. How I selected these particular examples is something simple: these are the two students that didn't come get their notebook at the end of Spring Semester. So, it's representative, I think, to the extent that it's chance on who I'm profiling.

8) First students' annotation here is Andrew. . . RW Connection

9) RW Connection

10) Words,

11) but not an "English guy"

12) Here is Student 2, Melissa . . .

- Evaluates the quality of her engagement and the writing

13)

- Rhetorical analysis is transferring into her OWN developing project

Overall, through this annotation process in their notebooks,

- o students built rich connections in course content
 - o or at least they reencountered it and didn't just leave it behind,
- o they identify trends in their interests and their thinking
- o they changed their minds
- o they (pretty unprompted) exercise vigorous independent criticism of their writing and reading.

14) Conclusion/Implications

There's more we could say about these marks, but in effort to conclude, here are just a few good outcomes of this experiment of annotation everywhere.

a) First, this habit creates a dynamic connection between reading and writing, composition and analysis, rhetoric of published and student texts. In short, annotation as method helps writers better see the craft of writing in what they read and the potential effects on readers in what they write.

b) Next, I found annotation a really useful medium of reflection: I found in the portfolios that having students annotate their final drafts helps specify their insights about what they can do in their writing, so much more than the generalized terms and platitudes of “I learned so much” that we often get in reflection letters.

c) Third, Annotation became a useful assessment bridge. In the notebook and the portfolio, my thinking about students’ texts could follow the lead of their thinking about their own texts.

d) The most important for me, annotation everywhere becomes the unifying critical rhetorical method. Annotating, seeing the parts of a text, became a habit, a way of seeing. I had often felt like my rhetoric focus in this course was something we started with and then it moved into the background. As students moved into researching, they struggled to see the operation of rhetoric in their own and others’ texts. I hated having the rhetorical analysis be “an essay”—because the essays weren’t that good, and the insights didn’t endure.

Now, constantly narrating how texts work—published and their own—is no longer just a discrete unit, it’s a regular condition, even an automatic habit, of my writers’ everyday reading and writing in and out of my classroom. Especially now as we teachers of writing are focused on how our instruction can capaciously travel, or transfer, it’s imperative to impart flexible enduring methods for rhetorical seeing and annotation everywhere can, I think, really help us to do that.

15) Thanks!