

## **ANNOTATION TOOLKIT**

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A writing intensive course requires a different mode of reading and engagement with the texts. You are reading not simply for comprehension, but to identify ideas that you can put to work – in your own writing and thought. Below I provide a set of “modes of engagement” to keep at your fingertips as you traverse any sociological text. If deployed properly, when someone asks you “so what did you think of that article/book” you are not only able to describe the basic argument, but also express an opinion, interpretation, application to the world, your research, and yourself.

**Problematic:** What is the problem the author is trying to solve? How do they frame it?

**Research Question:** What is the author’s primary research question? There may be secondary ones as well.

**Key Argument:** After reading a text you should be able to identify a key argument or thesis. Try to mark two or more core concepts that are central to the overarching argument. It’s better to walk away from a text with three key take home points than a long list of terms, which you will never remember after the course.

**Merits and Limits:** When reading a text you should be actively formulating an opinion of it. What are its merits? What are its limits?

**Internal Critique:** A critique within the author’s own argument. Does the author prove or substantiate her own argument? Does he contradict himself within the text?

**External Critique:** A critique of your own problematizing the author’s argument.

**Assumed Critique:** A critique from the perspective of another thinker or school of thought. (ie a Marxist critique, Foucauldian critique, Chicago School critique of a given text).

**Compare/Contrast:** One should always be thinking comparatively and relationally. How is this article different methodologically, conceptually, stylistically from others? How do these new arguments compliment or contradict with those we’ve already reviewed? This may not be a critique of one author against another, but rather noting a variation in emphasis.

**Extension:** Extend reflections in the text to personal experience or your own objects of research. As Hannah Arendt writes, “My assumption is that thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guide posts by which to take its bearings.”

**Confusions:** Mark points of confusion in the text. Formulating a simple question is often not enough. It’s more helpful to try to articulate and explain the source of confusion. This will be useful when bringing your queries to the seminar and including in your own writing.