

Many college students use highlighting as a reading tool. However, despite its popularity, highlighting tends not to be a very effective reading strategy. This handout shares effective reading strategies that you can use instead of or in addition to highlighting and shares tips for highlighting well.

## 1. Temptation of Highlighting

- a. Done to focus on important parts of text
- b. Problem – instead of using critical thinking, all effort is spent sorting important from unimportant
- c. Too much focus on detail can get away of a deeper understanding of the big picture
- d. Using highlighted text to review can lead to the illusion of understanding
  - i. Looking at content in a particular way repeated on a page can make it seem familiar
  - ii. We confuse familiarity with being able to apply, analyze, or evaluate the material – the higher order thinking needed for exams

## 2. Effective Reading Strategies

- a. Highlighting isn't 100% bad; highlighting can provide you a way to keep your hands busy and become more engaged in the text
- b. Read ahead to find out how you can do more to engage while reading and studying
- c. Effective strategies to engage your brain
  - i. Preview the text. Look through the chapter and note text features – headings, bold words, charts, graphs, images, and end-of-chapter questions. Give yourself a focus before reading.
  - ii. Know your purpose. Think about what you need to know or do after reading. Keep that in mind while reading and check to see if you reached your purpose at the end.
  - iii. Annotate. See the *Annotating* handout for more information
  - iv. Ask and answer questions. Turn headings into questions and answer as you read, and answer the questions the book provides.
  - v. Summarize. Stop after every paragraph or page and write a brief summary of the main concepts in your own words. If you can summarize accurately, you can be fairly confident in your own understanding.

## 3. Highlighting Tips

- a. Only highlight after you reach the end of a paragraph or section. Think about what you read and highlight the main concepts.
- b. Limit yourself to one sentence or phrase per paragraph.

