Good readers will think about texts in very specific ways as they read. “Writing in the Margins” is an active reading strategy that identifies and defines six common ways highly proficient readers think about the texts they read. We know that comprehension of a text improves when readers visualize ideas, summarize ideas, clarify information, make connections, respond/react to ideas, and ask questions. Where is this work to be done? Readers will use the margins of their texts to record their thoughts while they read. “Writing in the Margins” can be used with textbook readings, articles, primary source materials, or classroom Cornell Notes. It is simply a way of interacting with written material to process the information.

As you read the various types of texts assigned, make comments in the margins of the texts. Most likely, you will be responding to information you have circled or underlined during the “Marking the Text” phase of reading. Use the handout provided to assist you as you read the text and write in the margins. When you have interacted with your text using “Writing in the Margins” successfully, you will see various types of margin notes on the sides of your paper.

What if you can’t write on the text you are reading? No problem. Just make a chart in your Cornell Notes that has the paragraph #, a brief copied excerpt of the text, and your interaction from the “Writing in the Margins” strategy guide. It kind of resembles a Dialectical Journal when you do it this way.

Your teacher might limit the number of choices you have when starting to learn the strategy, but ultimately we want you to have a list of ways you can interact with texts floating around in your mind. We also want you to get so good at using “Writing in the Margins” that you know which ones to pick for a particular reading or type of thinking called for by any given text. Once you learn this skill inside and out, you will begin to use it instinctively—you won’t even need your teacher to tell you to do it! You’ll be asking questions in the margin of your text, drawing pictures, writing personal responses, and making connections to other things something in the text reminds you of. You should get used to using this strategy whenever you are having a hard time following the meaning or ideas of a text because it will slow you down a little and force you to interact and think about what the author is saying and doing. You may also use it when you find that your mind is filling up with ideas, pictures, and connections while you’re reading.

One last piece of advice about when to use Writing in the Margins—you can even use this strategy to interact with your Cornell Notes! As you
Writing in the Margins

Six Strategies to Use

When you write in the margins of your texts, you become actively engaged in what the text is saying. You’re not just reading to try and finish what the teacher told you to do…you are actually interacting with the ideas of the author, almost as if you were in a conversation with the text. Clarifying, summarizing, questioning, as well as other strategies provided will increase your comprehension of textual material, make the reading experience more interesting and personal, and providing ways for you to make your own meaning.

Why Should Students Write in the Margins?

Ultimately, Critical Reading strategies are meant to help you become a better reader, helping you to increase your level of college readiness so you can do well now and also prepare for life in the University after high school. This is not just busy work…. **Writing in the Margins** is a type of strategy good readers turn into a habit so they can easily use it to construct meaning from the texts they read. Someday you won’t be reading “like” a college student…you will be reading “as” a college student. Ask the following questions to reflect on the use of **Writing in the Margins**:

- How did this strategy improve your understanding of the text?
- What did using Writing in the Margins do to your level of interest, engagement, and/or understanding while you read?
- Why would readers want to use this strategy?
- When would you want to use a strategy like Writing in the Margins?
- What types of texts would it be useful on? What types would you want to steer-clear of using it on?