

Critical Reading Practice | Annotating a Text

Annotation Level 1: Rhetorical Elements

For any communication task that you engage in, whether organizing an event, designing an experiment, writing a Business memo, or writing an academic article, you will need to make strategic decisions to help you begin and sustain your project. You need a goal and a method for your project as well as a reason for completing it. And you also need an audience who will find the project useful. This kind of information (a goal, method, reason/motivation etc) is called rhetorical information or **rhetorical elements**. As students, you will be expected to identify rhetorical elements when you read articles. As professionals, you will be expected to have your own rhetorical elements to guide your own projects.

You will practice noticing **rhetorical elements** in other people's projects. Doing this will help you learn how to read and understand articles while also preparing you for your own project design. You will notice these elements by *annotating*. Annotating means marking a text for specific information. You will annotate six rhetorical elements (see below). Each element has a color, so you will use that color to underline the part of the text that applies to the element. Since some authors don't directly state their rhetorical elements, you will use language clues to help you find the elements. You will make a note describing the language and why it points to the element.

*exigence

What is the problem, challenge, or issue that started the authors' project? Look for terms of contrast or negation (e.g. *however, despite, nevertheless, no, none, not*) and terms like *problem* or *concern*.

*purpose

What is the goal of the text? In other words, what are the authors trying to do with their project? Look for terms such as *aim, goal, focus, reason for, or hope*.

*object of study

What is the subject that the authors are studying? Look for a key concept that shows up in the abstract, the introduction, the conclusion, and maybe the title.

*new offering

Where does this source indicate new ideas or conclusions resulting from the project? Look for terms such as *This suggests..., These results mean..., One way to interpret these findings...*

*relevance

What do the authors suggest is the significance of their work to the field? Look in the discussion, conclusion, or implications section.

*methodology

What research methods were used by the authors to answer their driving questions? Look for a methods section or verbs like *conduct, study, gather, select, survey, interview, or observe*.

annually by international students and their dependents for living expenses [in the United States] is significant. This is one of the key reasons for global competition for international students" (p. 7). Not less importantly, because these students come from different geographic backgrounds, they significantly contribute to the promotion of cultural diversity in the classroom and on campus, enriching the academic environment and adding education

en their culturally diverse backgrounds, international students may experience adjustment strain in an environment that are unique to them, such as cultural differences, language constraints, and social norms. Although research on the adjustment issues of this student body is extensive (Olivas & Lee, 2008; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Andrade & Evans, 2009). Despite numerous studies, there is still a need to examine what has been investigated in order to further understand the research being done on this subject. Thus, the purpose of this article is to review literature related to the adjustment issues of international students enrolled in American colleges and universities. The key research question guiding the review of the literature was: What are the major adjustment issues experienced by international students enrolled in colleges and universities?

***exigence**
The word clearly means lack or scarcity. This word seems to point towards the exigence of this article. The author hints that there was a lack of attention to living expenses and adjustment issues. The second underlined sentence suggests the same idea!

***purpose**
The purpose is to review the literature related to the subject of study.

***object of study**
The word clearly means lack or scarcity. This word seems to point towards the exigence of this article. The author hints that there was a lack of attention to living expenses and adjustment issues. The second underlined sentence suggests the same idea!

***methodology**
The word clearly means lack or scarcity. This word seems to point towards the exigence of this article. The author hints that there was a lack of attention to living expenses and adjustment issues. The second underlined sentence suggests the same idea!

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Annotation Level 2: Key Concepts and Key Terms

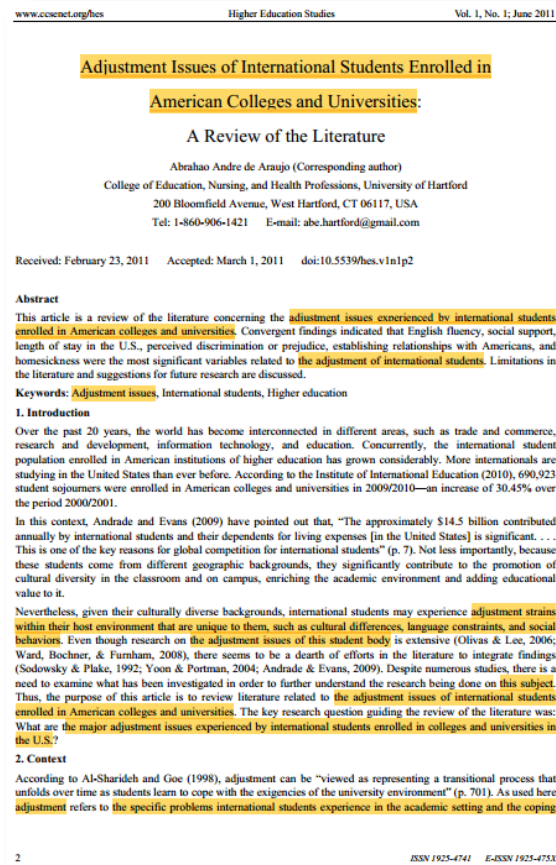
In addition to annotating rhetorical elements, you will also annotate key terms in our course texts. A key term is usually a noun phrase that an author uses to carry an idea through various sentences and even from paragraph to paragraph in order to connect other ideas to it. These words are "key" (i.e. important or essential) because they often represent the key concepts of a text along with any controlling ideas.

For example, in de Araujo (2011), one key concept throughout the article is adjustment issues, which "refers to the specific problems international students experience in the academic setting..." (p. 2). The concept of adjustment issues shows up over and over again in the article, appearing in the title, all of the major sections, and many of the paragraphs. This strategy allows de Araujo to connect this concept to many other ideas such as acculturation, social support programs, and stress. However, many different **words** are used to carry the concept of adjustment issues through the article; some examples include the following:

- *the adjustment issues experienced by international students enrolled in American colleges and universities,*
- *unique challenges emerging from cultural differences, language limitations, and potential prejudice and discrimination,*
- *international students' adjustment issues,*
- *the adjustment issues of student sojourners,*
- *these students' adjustments,*
- *their adjustment problems,*
- *these issues,* and
- *many other key terms.*

Sometimes these alternative terms can build in additional meaning to the concept through new modifiers (e.g. *unique challenges emerging from cultural differences, language limitations, and potential prejudice and discrimination*). However, different modifiers are commonly used to limit (or control) key concepts. For instance, de Araujo (2011) was not interested in all adjustment ever; instead, he controlled the scope of this concept using the prepositional phrase modifier *of international students*, and he even limited that further with the clause *enrolled in American colleges and universities*, implying that he was interested in issues for only international students and only international students in U.S. colleges. He even noted this limited scope, stating, "The purpose of this article is to review literature related to the adjustment issues **of international students enrolled in American colleges and universities**" (emphasis added, p. 2).

Nevertheless, notice that this author was generally comfortable reusing one noun for each key concept such as the word *issue* for the concept of adjustment issue of international students studying in America or the word *acculturation* for the idea of adjusting to the new academic environment in the U.S. Reusing a noun connected to a concept is an important strategy for helping readers keep track of all of the information related to that concept.



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Annotation Level 3: Macro-charting

As you read and annotate rhetorical elements, notice that some paragraphs do not contain rhetorical elements. To sharpen your reading comprehension and appreciate the author's text, you will have to comment on what the author is doing in those other paragraphs.

In your comment, you will explain what the author is **doing** in the paragraph in order to develop the project as a whole. This means you will need to use **active verbs** to describe the paragraph (e.g. In this paragraph, the author **illustrates** the article's main concept, "adjustment issues," by citing the research on "social support," one of the seven adjustment issues explored in this article).

Annotation Level 4: Annotating by Asking Questions

For Annotation level 3, you will look closely at a text and ask questions that help you respond to the project and guide your future research.

You will ask questions that fit into the following categories. These questions below are meant to be examples. As much as possible, you should create your own questions.

Two Questions about Project Design

Why did the author choose this object of study?
How does this finding respond to _____?
How does the sample size affect _____?
How does this finding respond to _____ aspect of exigence?

Two Questions about Content

What is _____?
What is the relationship between _____ and _____?
Is _____ the same as _____?

Two Questions about Project Design

Why did the author choose this object of study?
How does this finding respond to _____?
How does the sample size affect _____?
How does this finding respond to _____ aspect of exigence?

Two Questions about connections to other sources/things you already know

How does this relate to _____ problem?
Would this be helpful to people in my country?
How does this compare to the other article I read about _____?