Textbook Underlining – The Right Way!

Underlining is one of the most popular textbook study aids – if you doubt it, just look at some used tests in the bookstore. Unfortunately, most students don’t know how to underline correctly; they may not even know why they are underlining!

For your underlining to be effective, it should accomplish these goals:

1. It should help you get more involved with what you’re reading. The more involved you are, the more you will comprehend and retain.
2. It should help you when the time comes to review for tests.

If you follow the simple rules listed below, you may see an improvement in your studying:

Rule 1. Don’t be too hasty. First, read a paragraph, looking for them main idea and/or important facts. Then go back and underline to highlight these main ideas and facts.

Rule 2. Don’t underline too much or too little. Unless you underline the right amount (usually between 25-35%), you will end up having to re-read too much material at review time.

Rule 3. Very Important! Underline so that your underlining makes complete ideas that can be read independently from the original materials. Confused? The underlining used in this explanation is an example of the method. Notice that you can get the essential points by just reading the underlined parts. A small vertical line (____) is used to denote the beginning of each new thought being expressed by the underlining. (By the way, 30% of the total words used here have been underlined.)

If you would like to practice in using this method, come to the Student Academic Success Services in 340 Appleby Hall. We have an Underlining Program that gives you a chance to become proficient with the technique.