FOUR UNDERLINING METHODS

Introduction
Many students find underlining to be an effective textbook study aid. However, not all students underline in the same way. Therefore, one purpose of this exercise is to present a number of possible methods of underlining. The advantages and disadvantages of each underlining method will be considered. You can then decide which method, if any, would work best for you.

Ideally, any underlining method that you use should accomplish two main purposes: First, the act of underlining should help you to get more involved with the material the first time you read it. In other words, the fact that you are underlining should help you to concentrate on what the author is saying. Secondly, the underlining should help you to review the material later on. One way that it can help is by reducing the amount of information that you have to re-read during a review.

In this handout you will be introduced to four different underlining methods. Each one has certain advantages and disadvantages. The methods are:

1. Complete-thought underlining
2. Telegraphic underlining
3. Incomplete-thought underlining
4. Main idea-detail underlining

The First Reading
Many study skills counselors recommend that you read through at least an entire paragraph before trying to underline it. Then you will have a better idea of what to underline and what not to. As you read a paragraph, try to figure out which sentences express MAIN IDEAS. "Main idea" sentences are ones that express a general thought or idea that is going to be discussed in the paragraph or in the material which follows that paragraph. Also, try to figure out which sentences, if any, in the paragraph express important SUPPORTING DETAILS. "Supporting detail" sentences give facts or examples that usually support, back up, explain, or otherwise expand on a main idea sentence or sentences in a paragraph. (See Pauk, How to Study in College, pp. 110-111 for a more detailed discussion of main ideas and details.)

Once you have read the paragraph, the next step is to underline it in a way that will help you to review the material later on. Here are four possible ways of doing the underlining:

METHOD ONE: COMPLETE-THOUGHT UNDERLINING

Description: For each sentence that contains a main idea or important supporting detail, underline as much as is necessary to convey the complete idea. Underline ALL the words in any part that you feel should be underlined.

Example: During the time that your eye is stopped (and that is usually for about one fourth of a second), you are able to see a relatively limited amount of the material on the page. There is no clear vision while your eyes are moving, so you only see the reading material while your eyes are stopped. The average number of eye fixations in normal reading by a college student is just slightly more than one word per eye fixation. Most people make almost as many eye fixations as there are words. The notion of reading whole phrases or paragraphs at a time simply is not supported by what we know from research. It seems to readers that they are responding to the material in phrases, but actually they seem to be superimposing a phrase pattern on the material as part of the mental process, not as part of the visual process.

Explanation: Notice that the underlining includes the main idea statement (first sentence) and much of the supportive information. Also, notice that wherever a section has been underlined, ALL words in that part have been underlined. For example, all the words in the first sentence have been underlined. In the second sentence, only the first part needed to be underlined to convey the idea, but all the words in that first part of the sentence were underlined. In summary, underline all the words in as much of a sentence as is necessary to convey the thought. Of course, do not underline a sentence that has no useful information.
Advantage: This method tends to take less time because you simply underline all of the words in any part that you think is important. Compared with the next method to be discussed, this method is relatively easy to do.

Disadvantage: One disadvantage of this method is that you tend to underline more words than you would with the next method we will discuss. Therefore, when you review the material later, you have more to read.

METHOD TWO: TELEGRAPHIC UNDERLINING

Description: For each sentence that contains a main idea or important supporting detail, underline just enough words to convey the essence of the idea. Leave out any unimportant or redundant words in those sentences that you underline, so that the part underlined forms an abbreviated, telegram-like message.

Example: During the time that your eye is stopped (and that is usually for about one fourth of a second), you are able to see a relatively limited amount of the material on the page. There is no clear vision while your eyes are moving, so you only see the reading material while your eyes are stopped. The average number of eye fixations in normal reading by a college student is just slightly more than one word per eye fixation. Most people make almost as many eye fixations as there are words. The notion of reading whole phrases or paragraphs at a time simply is not supported by what we know from research. It seems to readers that they are responding to the material in phrases, but actually they seem to be superimposing a phrase pattern on the material as part of the mental process, not as part of the visual process.

Explanation: Notice that the underlining includes the main idea statement and much of the supporting information. Also, notice that many of the unnecessary words have been left out. For example, in the first sentence, the phrases, "that your", "and that is usually", and others have not been underlined. Nevertheless, the underlined parts of the sentence still make sense, just like a telegram would: "During the time...eye is stopped...for about one fourth...second, you...see a relatively limited amount of...material." The rest of the underlining has been done in a similar manner. Note that a small horizontal line (_____) is used to denote the beginning of each new thought being expressed by the underlining. This line helps you to reread the underlining more quickly during reviews.

Advantages: This method seems to have two important advantages. First, by selecting some words and leaving out others, you are, in effect, "personalizing" the writing. In other words, you are to some extent, changing the wording to make it more your own. Secondly, because you are eliminating every unnecessary word, there is much less material to review later on, thus saving you time during review. You tend to end up with fewer words underlined than you would with the complete-thought method.

Disadvantages: During the underlining step, this method probably takes longer than the complete-thought method described earlier. As you underline, you need to weigh the importance of each word. Also, when you reread the underlined parts later, they may seem more difficult to read because of the missing words. Many students have reported, however, that both the underlining and reading become easier with practice.

METHOD THREE: INCOMPLETE-THOUGHT UNDERLINING

Description: Underline only part of any sentence that contains a main idea or an important supporting detail. IMPORTANT: Do NOT underline the complete thought. Underline only enough to give yourself a clue to what is in the paragraph. Don't "give away" all of the information in a sentence.

Example: During the time that your eye is stopped (and that is usually for about one fourth of a second), you are able to see a relatively limited amount of the material on the page. There is no clear vision while your eyes are moving, so you only see the reading material while your eyes are stopped. The average number of eye fixations in normal reading by a college student is just slightly more than one word per eye fixation. Most people make almost as many eye fixations as there are words. The notion of reading whole phrases or paragraphs at a time simply is not supported by what we know from research. It seems to readers that they are responding to the material in phrases, but actually they seem to be superimposing a phrase pattern on the material as part of the mental process, not as part of the visual process.
Explanation: Notice that the underlining covers the main idea statement and much of the supporting information. However, also notice that wherever a section is underlined, only part of the section is underlined. For example, in the first sentence, the phrase, “During the time that your eye is stopped,” is underlined. If you were reviewing this section in preparation for a test, the underlined part should act like a self-test question. In other words, you should ask yourself whether you can remember the missing information (namely, what happens when your eye is stopped), and then if you cannot remember it, you should read enough of the non-underlined part to refresh your memory.

Advantages: The incomplete-thought method has one important advantage over the previous two methods we have mentioned. Unlike the other underlining methods, this one lends itself more to recitation during review sessions. Recitation is a self-testing technique that has been found to be a very effective learning aid. In recitation, you use questions or partial cues to test yourself by trying to recall from memory the information related to the cues or questions.

Disadvantages: If you are underlining some material with the intent of reviewing it quickly later, then the incomplete-thought method probably would not be appropriate, for it is intended to be used for recitation/review, which takes longer than simply rereading but can be much more effective for retention.

METHOD FOUR: MAIN IDEA-DETAIL UNDERLINING

Description: The main idea-detail method can be used as an addition to any of the three underlining techniques already discussed. The idea is to carry your underlining one step further by distinguishing between the main ideas and the supporting details. (“Main ideas” and “supporting details” are explained on the first page of this handout.) One of many possible techniques can be used to distinguish main ideas from supporting details. Here are a few possibilities; you may be able to think of others:

1. Asterisk(*), etc. Place an asterisk(*), star, vertical line, or other symbol of your choice next to each underlined main idea.
2. Double-underlining. Place two lines under each main idea statement and one line under each supporting detail that you wish to emphasize.
3. Color coding. Use different colors to distinguish main ideas from supporting details. Of course, stay with the same colors once you have decided on them.

Advantages: Why bother to distinguish main ideas form supporting details? One reason is that it may help your comprehension and retention. Some students report that this additional step helps them to concentrate and to review. Also, you might use this method as an aid to recitation. (“Recitation” is defined on the previous page.) You could look at a main idea and try to fill in the related details from memory; then check your accuracy.

Disadvantages: Of course, this step adds time to the first reading of the material; so you must decide whether the benefits are worth the time spent.

Summary: Using your own words, fill in the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVANTAGE(S)</th>
<th>DISADVANTAGE(S)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMPLETE-THOUGHT UNDERLINING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELEGRAPHIC UNDERLINING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOMPLETE-THOUGHT UNDERLINING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAIN IDEA-DETAIL UNDERLINING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXERCISES

Identification. The passage below contains examples of complete-thought, telegraphic, and incomplete-thought underlining. In the margin next to each underlining example is a number that corresponds to an “answer” space below the passage. Identify each underlining example by writing the name (complete-thought, etc.) in the appropriate answer space.

The modern emphasis on the scientific study of reading dates from approximately 1887 when a French scientist name Javal discovered that the visual process in reading is not the technique people had originally assumed it to be. It seems to most persons that as you read along a line of print, your eye moves along smoothly, recognizing words and phrases, one after the other, as it moves. Javal carefully observed the eyes of persons reading and discovered two quite important things. First, the eyes, rather than moving, were stopped most of the time. Second, rather than moving slowly and smoothly along a line, they move in extremely quick jumps from one point of fixation to the next. Javal was so struck by these jumps that he called eye movements saccadic after the French word “to jump”. His findings were a surprise to many persons.

The discovery of saccadic eye movements by Javal stimulated many other people to try to study in more detail the nature of the mechanical process of reading. One of the earliest techniques was an effort to record eye movements on paper by connecting a little pneumatic tube through a long series of pulleys and wires to a pen which would write on moving paper and jiggle back and forth as the eyes moved. This turned out to be a reasonably good way of finding out how many eye movements a person was making, but it was quite uncomfortable for the person being tested.

During the period from 1900 to about 1920 a new technique in studying eye movements in reading came into use with the development of eye movement cameras. A rather complicated set of light lenses and mechanical apparatus enabled scientists to bounce a beam of light off the cornea of the eye through a series of lenses and onto a spool of moving film. Early cameras of this type were extremely expensive and difficult to construct.

ANSWERS: Identify the kinds of underlining used in the passage above.

(1)_________________ (4)_______________
(2)_________________ (5)_______________
(3)_________________ (6)_______________
Practice

Below, a short passage on the origins and uses of paragraphing has been divided into three parts. Try out each of the underlining methods on the designated part. As you work, keep these suggestions in mind: (1) Quickly read or skim through an entire paragraph before starting to underline it. (2) Look for main ideas and important supporting details. (3) Be selective; if you underline too much, the underlining becomes less effective for review.

Complete-Thought Underlining
An explanation of how paragraphing was developed may be helpful. In the earliest examples of writing on paperlike material, parchment and vellum, for instance, the scribe used every bit of space for letters and words, since the supply of writing surfaces was limited. During a later period, writers evidently felt they needed to indicate breaks in thought or groupings of related thoughts so they conceived the notion of paragraphing. Literally, paragraph means a writing (graph) beside (para), both parts from ancient Greek. This term came into use because the paragraph sign appeared to the left of the written matter in whatever margin or space was available. Readers then grasped the idea that the author wanted them to realize that he had in mind a new concept or thought to develop--hence, a new paragraph. Subsequently, the indentation pattern was adopted, but this did not happen until many generations later.

Telegraphic Underlining
In one sense, indenting a line from the left is a kind of punctuation sign used by the author for the reader. He wants readers to see that a new group of thoughts is about to be expressed. He is also indicating that in a single paragraph he sees these thoughts as having a relationship. They all present a kind of unity or closeness to each other in idea, time, or even space, perhaps. Clearly, the writer who knows his craft makes use of a paragraph break as a tool to help his reader get meaning. Thus, it might be said that the comma usually indicates the least break in thought between ideas, the semicolon still greater differentiation, the period a definite stop, the paragraph a really sizable separation, and the chapter or part the greatest partitioning an author can use.

Incomplete-Thought Underlining
The amount of paragraphing is to some extent left up to the author. He may choose to organize his thoughts on a particular topic to show a four-unit whole. If he does, he will probably use four paragraphs to present his point of view. Another author may see only three or possibly five major division of his topic. The result will very likely be a three or five paragraph essay.

An author often arranges certain statements within a particular paragraph. Experienced readers realize that everything the writer expresses within one unit(paragraph) is considered by him to be part of a single complete idea that he is developing. Hence, paragraph unity is achieved as the writer succeeds in getting across this particular rounded thought.

How a paragraph is put together depends upon the idea itself, the way the author views it, the relationship of parts of an idea to the main thought, and other similar matters.

ANSWERS TO IDENTIFICATION ITEMS:  (1) complete-thought
(2) telegraphic
(3) incomplete-thought
(4) complete-thought
(5) telegraphic
(6) incomplete-thought
Underlining Practice Sheet

Political Theory

Political theory (often called "political thought", "political ideas", "political philosophy", or "theory of the state") is that branch of political science which attempts to arrive at generalizations, inferences, or conclusions to be drawn from the data gathered by other specialists, not only in political science and the social sciences, but throughout the whole range of human knowledge and experience. Political theory may be called the "so what?" department - the place where findings by statisticians, psychologists, historians, and all the rest of the researchers and tabulators may be weighed, tied together, cross-referenced, and contemplated, to the end that meaning and significance may be extracted from this mountainous mass of data. "Facts", even if demonstrably incontrovertible - do not, by themselves, point to any single, inescapable course of action. The function of the political theorist is to consider facts in all their varied ramifications and at least suggest conclusions, remedies, and public policies. This is not to say that most scholars in the field of political theory do in fact come to grips with all or most of our contemporary problems and suggest remedies. Indeed, too many of them rake over the ashes of the dead past. But if only a small proportion labor toward integrating our tremendous and rapidly growing fund of political knowledge, they perform an invaluable service in this age of overspecialization.