

Organizing Information I: Highlighting

Students sometimes feel overwhelmed by the large amount of new information presented in their classrooms and textbooks.

- The first step in handling a large amount of information is to reduce the material to its most important parts, by deciding what is important, less important, and unimportant.
- The second step is to organize the important information so that it is easy to study.
 - For help with the first step, see Organizing Information I – III.
 - For help with the second step, see Organizing Information IV – VI.

What is Highlighting?

Highlighting is an information reduction strategy that forces the reader to decide what is most important in a text. Sorting information in a text by highlighting also improves comprehension and recall. A student can highlight effectively by following a few rules:

1. **Analyze the assignment:** determine what it is your instructor wants you to learn from the material. Lecture notes and class assignments can help to figure out what is most important.
2. **Think about how much of the subject you already know;** don't waste time by highlighting facts you're already familiar with.
3. **Read the whole paragraph, section, or chapter before you highlight,** then go back and highlight the most important parts of the overall text.
4. **Pay attention to section headings and boldface type;** they may indicate the overall topic of the section and what is most important to highlight.
5. **Highlight main ideas and major supporting details.** Avoid highlighting examples and other minor details.
6. **Only highlight key words and phrases;** avoid highlighting complete sentences. If you are highlighting too much, you probably aren't sorting out the information carefully enough.
7. **Highlight quickly.** If you understood the material during your initial reading, your highlighting should be fast and efficient.
8. **Develop your system of highlighting.** You can use symbols, marks, and different colored inks to further organize your information.



Once you get the hang of highlighting, you will no longer have to search through the textbook looking for the answer to a test question that just isn't in your notes. After you develop your own style and method of highlighting, you can quickly scan through the book when you study.

Adapted from McWhorter, Kathleen T. Reading Across the Disciplines. 2nd Ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.