Chapter I. Annotating Your Way into Academic Discourse

What Is Academic Discourse?

In the simplest terms, **academic discourse** is how scholars—or academics, as they are sometimes called—speak and write. Believe it or not, you already have some experience with academic discourse. Think back to the type of writing you completed in high school. You were probably expected to write in a more formal manner than if you were writing a text message or email to your friends. This formality is one aspect of academic discourse. Think, too, about your participation in class discussions. You probably spoke more formally and precisely during these discussions than if you were simply hanging out and talking with your friends. Academic discourse is not as casual as everyday speaking and writing, but strives to be more formal, complex, and precise. At the college level, you will be expected to further develop your abilities to participate in academic discourse. While each field or discipline (e.g. Biology, English, Psychology) has its own specific ways of writing, all disciplines within the academy encourage more sophisticated forms of communication than those we use every day.

In order to participate in the conversations that go on across disciplines within the academy, you will need to hone your abilities to use academic discourse effectively. This is a goal that should guide you early in your general education courses and all the way through the courses in your major. Inserting your voice into scholarly conversations—rather than just summarizing what other scholars have said—may be new for you. Some previous instructors may have told you not to include your "opinion" or "voice" in your writing. Maybe you have been prohibited from using "I." This was the case for one of my students who described the difficulty this posed for him while writing a research paper: "I had to concentrate most of my efforts on analyzing my sources while trying to make sure my own voice was heard. I will admit that it was tough due to the fact that much of my high school writing career had been focused on keeping my voice out of [my] paper[s]." While it may take some time for you to become comfortable inserting your own voice into scholarly conversations, as a college-level reader and writer it is important that you become a visible and active part of your writing, just as you are expected to be an active reader. As noted in the introduction, annotation—which

brings the acts of reading and writing together—can lay the foundation for your productive participation in scholarly conversations.

What Is Annotation?

You have probably been asked by instructors to "mark-up" something you are reading. Maybe you were asked to jot down questions or notes in the margins, highlight the important parts, or circle words you don't know. Maybe you have developed these habits on your own. The act of marking up a text is commonly referred to as annotating. The word "annotate" comes from the Latin word for "to note or mark" or "to note down." To **annotate** is exactly that—it's when you make notes on a text. "What does this have to do with entering scholarly conversations?" you may be wondering. How can marking up a reading help you respond to other scholars in your discipline?

When you annotate you are writing as you read. You make notes, you comment, react, and raise questions in the margins of your text. Reflections of your engagement with the text and its author, annotations represent the initial and preliminary ways you are participating in a scholarly conversation with the author of what you are reading. As such, your annotations can serve as the basis for the more extensive contributions you will be expected to make to scholarly conversations. For example, if you need to write an essay about something you have read, you can return to your annotations—to the questions you posed and comments you made in the margins—because these are moments in which you are already interacting with the text and its author. From there you can develop those preliminary interactions into a more detailed and comprehensive response.

Annotations can be handwritten on a printed text or applied digitally on an electronic text. As noted in the Introduction, annotating digitally will allow you to mark up any text, including those on the Web, access your annotations from any computer, and share your annotations with others. See the Introduction for specific instructions on how to digitally annotate the reading selections in this textbook.

Instead of annotating the readings digitally, some instructors might ask you to print out the readings from this textbook and annotate them by hand as in the sample that follows.

As you read the annotations in the two sample texts, notice the different ways the student uses annotations. The students ask questions, challenge points, define some words, and make personal connections. In these examples, the students are engaging in more general annotation practices that are not governed by a specific reading strategy like those you will be introduced to in Chapter 2.

Encountering the Essay abolizing the relationship does on the page, thus appropriately symbolicing the relationship between this single letter and the 'self' is presented to represent Today's writer's marker is flooded with autohography - now more likely to be blocked 'mercaoit' in the singular, as though the more nationate merrary taster presares something grander. Memory (the 'tern' was almost always used in tide planta) were causonas INTRODUCTION utobo. onvinced that the writer is telling the truth. When do you think i written by public figures who recorded their participati The Autobiographical "I" historical events and their encounters with outer promised mean visuals. General Utyases S. Grant's two-volume *Primal Memoi* (1889–86) were bestellers. The old memoirs were penned I well-established individuals in the twilight of their careers; the ne memoir is frequently the work of an emerging writer aspiring In college writing courses years ago, instructors referred to a sylo-ging that may help explain the enormous popularity of the personal memoir. It were something list list. "Tow write best when you write about what you know, what you know best is yourself, therefore, you write best when you write about yourself." As a sylogiam, this seemed valid: The conclusion followed logically from its premises. of So why diving teachers about yourself. There creasy when they assigned personal topics? As anyone case, the conclusion rests on dullogia assumptions. The premises sound reasonable, but they raise isome fundamental periodis. Do people really write best about the subjects they know Called The memory is any work of an emerging writer appring to the memory is early abused by those who believe the gener automatically confers upon the author some sort of importance. It's only natural, isn't, it, to be the hences or hereines of our orien lives? And as the main protagonists, how can we resist the impulse to occupy center stage and not consider ourselves grided with greater sensitivity, finer values, higher moral authority, and cape porting cast of elumemoirs Syllogismit 10gilcal preserve issuitivity, finer values, higher moral authority, and cape-cially keener powers of recollection than any members of our sup-porting case of characters? The most interesting autobiography cased, never published in its entirety, and never according to any intendicat—in many ways a colour layer houses and the autobiography grappled with early and have a colour of the autobiography grappled with early and have a colour of the its early conscient and the colour layer houses and it was to exhibit coursels in recentiable attitudes exclusively and tried to display himself as homeshy as he could. It was a noble ex-periment, but its proved impossible: Thave been discating this autobiography of mine, he wrote, for three months; I have thought of fiftee hundred or new housant incidents in my life with I have questions. Do people really write best about the subjects they know best? We see evidence all the time of experts being unable to comicate the basic concepts of their professions, which explains so many technical books are authored by both an expert and a 4 Wing the source of the so To D thing, too much can sometimes be an impediment to clear and ro-to D but expression. Shakespeareas do not always witch the best books Close T on Shakespeare. UNAIT EXALTLY I'A SIMILIPEAR CAN? MC. Can we also safely conclude that we know ourselves best of all? If so, then why do so many of us spend so much time in psychotherapy or counseling session? Surely, the pursuit of the self-especially the "hidden" self-has been a major industry. Selfknowledge, of course, continouts us with another logical problem: Haw can the self the time the harmone and the home Dott when the self of the self. of fifteen hundred or two thousand incidents in my life which I am ashamed of but I have not gonen one of them to consent to go on ' paper yet.' To say that memoir, autobiography, and the period testy are casily abused is not to disparage these vigorous corres Democra-tizing the memoir has resulted in many wonderful books, not a few crafted by young or rebusing bound and the period. be at the same time the knower and the grown' That why biogra-phies can be so much more revealing than autobiographies. As Dostoversky said in his *Note from Underground*. 'A true autobiography is almost an impossibility... man is bound to be about himself.' Yet the illusion that we do know ourselves best must serve as crafted by young or relatively young writers who have learned to ask themselves how to prevent their personal writing from detepriorating into narcissism and self-absorption. This is a question ANITY amone setting out to write personally must face sooner or later. The solution requires a healthy regimen of self-stepticism and a propert for uncertainty. Though the first-perion singular may abound, it should be a richly complex and mutable 'I, never our abound, it should be a richly complex and mutable 'I, never our of the designates a reliably known, wholly static emity. In some of the both comfort and inspiration to the growing wave of memoirists who seem to write with one finger glued to the shift key and au-other to the letter I, which on the keyboard looks nothing like it best memoirs and personal essays, the writers are mysteries to themselves, and the work evolves into an enactment of surprise and self-discovery. These elements keep "life writing" live writing as a mysterious "I" converses with an equally mysterious "I" > How would thus way k? What does thus look like?

What Are the Differences Between Annotating and Highlighting?

It is important to keep in mind that annotating and highlighting often serve different purposes. Highlighting draws your attention to what you deem to be the important parts of a reading. Highlighting can help you recall those moments and the information presented in them. On the other hand, annotating encourages you to mark additional elements of the text—those beyond just "the important parts." You will notice that in the previous samples highlighting is never used on its own. Rather, the yellow highlighting that does appear is accompanied by a comment, question, or some kind of written response. Although highlighting may be an important supplement to annotating, highlighting on its own is usually better preparation for assignments that ask you to memorize con-

8 Chapter I

cepts and ideas from readings as opposed to those that ask you to write about and respond to what you have read. A record of your reading and your responses to the text and its author, annotations can provide you with the foundation for entering scholarly conversations, which is what you will be asked to do throughout college.