



## A Guide to Integrating Social Annotation into a Course

1. **Get to know social annotation.** If you are new to this learning strategy, you may find the following resources helpful:

- [A PowerPoint \(in PDF\) introducing social annotation](#)
- [Resources on social annotation](#)
- [A sample text annotated](#) in a collaborative environment
- [Reviews of collaborative platforms](#) (including social annotation)

### 2. Plan, Design, Review

a. **DESIGN A SOCIAL ANNOTATION ACTIVITY WITH A CLEAR OBJECTIVE.** The backward design model is a useful way to plan a course or set of learning activities. According to this model, you plan your course or activity around a clear learning outcome and the assessment of students' attainment of it. (Some teachers find it helpful to also develop the marking criteria before fleshing out the details of the activity). Determining the objective(s) you have for having your students practice social annotation and how you will assess whether they have reached that objective, will help ensure that the activity is well aligned with the assessment and the learning outcome.

The [Technoped Activity Design Template](#) is a tool that can help you with this process. You may also find it useful to review your course or activity design with a pedagogical counsellor or colleague who has implemented a similar technology into a course.

b. **CHOOSE (A) PLATFORM(S) OR APP(S) APPROPRIATE FOR SOCIAL ANNOTATION.** In deciding if a platform is appropriate, you will want to consider the following:

- **Environment:** Do you want students to work synchronously (at the same time) or asynchronously (at any time), in-class or at-home? Do you require a platform that provides some classroom management functionalities? What content types will students annotate? Text, video, images?
- **Interaction:** How would you like students (and teacher) to interact on the platform, individually (student–content and/or student–teacher), in partners or groups (student–student)?
- **Support:** Consider how much you will need to run the activity with the chosen platform. (Feel free to contact the PSI office and members of the OCSA team who can provide technopedagogical support.)
- **Privacy and Intellectual Properties:** Consider the user rights and privacy policies of the platform. Does the platform allow you to control whether student work will be visible to you, to the class, or to the public? What rights does the platform

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*Tip: A few different platforms can be useful for social annotation. Some offer analytics and automatic grading, classroom management, etc. To read some reviews of social annotation platforms, and a discussion of their pedagogical value visit <http://collab.vanierpsi.profweb.ca/>.*

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claim (or disclaim) to the user content posted on its site? Remember that providing students with or recommending online materials, must be reported to **Copybec**, just as when you create a course pack. Click here for instructions on the simple reporting process.

3. **Practice, practice, practice!** Get to know the technology before you introduce it to the students. This gives you the opportunity to familiarize yourself with its functionalities, discover its potential as a learning tool, trouble-shoot potential challenges, and find useful short-cuts. This step will simplify introducing the platform to students.

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*Tip: For more suggestions on how to incorporate a new technology in a course, see [A Guide to Integrating Online Collaboration into a Course](#), especially Points 3–6.*

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4. **Scaffold the process and equip the students for each step.** Social annotation entails more than just making a few comments on a text. In order to help students develop the skills needed to engage thoughtfully with content in a collaborative context, it is helpful to provide them with tools that will help them learn to annotate well. (Click the links below to see samples of a tool).
  - **CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS.** Studies have shown that students engage with content more deeply when using social annotation rather than a forum, *if* they are given guidance. Therefore, it's important to provide clear parameters, such as the type of ideas, concepts, or subjects to focus on, the nature of the comments (e.g. constructive feedback, alternate views or debate, furthering the discussion, etc.), the structure of the comments (e.g., a greeting – at least one positive comment – a critique – a suggestion for improvement), the number of comments that must be initiated, the number of replies to make to other comments, the number of pages in the text that must be annotated, etc.
  - **A MARKING RUBRIC.** This tool not only allow students to know what goal they are aiming for, but to self-assess whether they are meeting requirements as they annotate. They can also be used to help students peer review annotations.
  - **NETIQUETTE RULES.** While most students are at home with social media, many are unused to working in a digital academic context. Laying some ground rules for online behavior helps foster respectful behaviour.
  - **5 TIPS ON OFFERING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK.** Students who may be shy to critique the ideas of others or unsure of how to do so thoughtfully and respectfully can benefit from advice on how to do so effectively and respectfully.
  - **SAMPLE ANNOTATED CONTENT.** Modelling how to comment well helps concretize the target you want them to aim for in annotating.



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*Tips: Here are a few suggestions for scaffolding social annotation:*

- *Before handing out netiquette rules and guidelines for offering constructive feedback, ask the class to generate these collaboratively. By helping to establish rules and guidelines will increase, students will better understand them.*
- *Share a sample annotated text with the class. Make sure that some comments are constructive/helpful, some are vague or unhelpful. Include a few that are less respectful or too argumentative. Ask students to discuss the comments: what makes for a useful, thoughtful, or constructive comment? What characterizes a weak or unhelpful comment? By asking themselves these questions, students can collectively construct an understanding of how to effectively annotate and can sensitize them to the need to be respectful and constructive.*
- *Ask students to annotate a print text and share their comments with a group. Since digital environments can be distracting, it may be worthwhile to give students a chance to focus on learning to annotate with few distractions. This may also help students recognize that the online commenting is an iteration of their in-class comments.*
- *Pair groups and share anonymized comments made by one with the other. Ask the groups to grade some of their partner group's comments, justifying the grade given using the marking rubric or checklist. Ask them to then offer advice on how to improve the annotations using the Advice on Giving Constructive Feedback.*
- *Ask a few students to read out some of their comments in class. This may prevent them from writing inappropriate comments to their peers, since they will think of their comments as interactions with the class community.*
- *After a first attempt at annotation, ask students to self-assess some of their comments based on the marking rubric and reflect on how they might be improved.*

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5. **Set realistic goals.** Learning to read deeply takes time. It may be best to start by asking students to comment on a shorter text that can yield interesting discussion. If students are asked to read and comment on texts that are the same length or longer than they are accustomed to, they may feel overwhelmed.
  6. **Orient students' expectations.** Social annotation differs from most social media platforms which tend to focus the attention on connecting with individuals. With social annotation, the focus is on the discourse. Students who work synchronously may express frustration that they can't find the threads their peers are currently writing in. If they understand that they don't need to know where their peers are, they just need to focus on reading and commenting on the discourse and the annotations of others, they will settle in more readily.