Telegrammatic Highlighting

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In the "Rite" step of SQ4R, you may choose to underline, highlight, take marginal notes, or outline a reading. Difficult texts or those you must know in great detail may demand marginal notes or outlines, but underlining and highlighting work well for easier or more general material. To improve comprehension and prepare for effective review, avoid random marking. Instead, use the "telegrammatic" technique

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The Objective: Your underlined or highlighted words should give you a sufficient, correct summary of the material. The model is a telegram, that old-fashioned, pre-telephone and pre-email form of communication. Because the sender pays for a telegram by the word, a message is reduced to the bare essentials.

By phone, you might call a friend to say, "Hi, I'll be in San Antonio this weekend for a conference. Can we get together and catch up on all the news? I'll be staying at the Menger Hotel from Thursday evening through Sunday afternoon. I can't wait to fill you in on...."

By telegram, you might say "At San Antonio Menger Thursday to Sunday. Call me."

The phone call uses 43 words and the telegram uses only 9.

The telegram is your model for effective underlining or highlighting.

Telegrammatic Highlighting Example

Read aloud only the underlined words in Example A, then B. Afterwards, imagine you are reviewing this reading before a test. Which one would give you the sufficient, complete summary of the material?

Example A

Since the retina is the sensitive organ for seeing, it deserves closer attention than the other structures of the eye. If we examine it with a microscope, we can see that it is made up of extremely tiny cells of two basic types - rods and cones. The rods are cylindrical in shape, but the cones are rather tapered. Our best estimate is that the eye contains between 110,000,000 and 125,000,000 rods and between 6,300,000 and 6,800,000 cones. This tremendous number of rods and cones, however, does not spread uniformly over the entire retina. Rather the cones are most numerous in a highly specialized region of the retina known as the fovea, and the rods occur most frequently about 20 degrees away from the fovea. The fovea is a slightly depressed area of the retina.

Example B

Since the retina is the sensitive organ for seeing, it deserves closer attention than the other structures of the eye. If we examine it with a microscope, we can see that it is made up of extremely tiny cells of two basic types - rods and cones. The rods are cylindrical in shape, but the cones are rather tapered. Our best estimate is that the eye contains between 110,000,000 and 125,000,000 rods and between 6,300,000 and 6,800,000 cones. This tremendous number of rods and cones, however, does not spread uniformly over the entire retina. Rather the cones are most numerous in a highly specialized region of the retina known as the fovea, and the rods occur most frequently about 20 degrees away from the fovea. The fovea is a slightly depressed area of the retina.

While Example A did have fewer words underlined, the underlined words did not give enough information for it to make sense. Try to use this method of highlighting/underlining as you read. It does take more thought, but that will keep you focused on the reading and add an additional layer of learning the material.