Hypothes.is Social Annotation

Pratt CTL Faculty Spotlight, April 24, 2025

Hypothesis is a powerful **social annotation tool** for your web browser that turns any website into something you can leave notes and highlights on. And you can share annotations within a private group you create—such as a group for your class—and reply to annotations left among members of that group.

Getting set up

1. Head to the [Hypothes.is Get Started page](#) to create a free Hypothes.is account (they're good about not spamming you).

2. Follow item #2 in the same [Get Started page](#) to add Hypothes.is to your browser. Note that there are different instructions based on whether you are using Google Chrome specifically or another browser.

    If you're using Chrome, follow the instructions to add the Hypothes.is extension. The link to follow is represented in the video below:

If using any browser other than Chrome (like Firefox or Safari), you'll be dragging the button they provide up to the favorites toolbar of the browser.
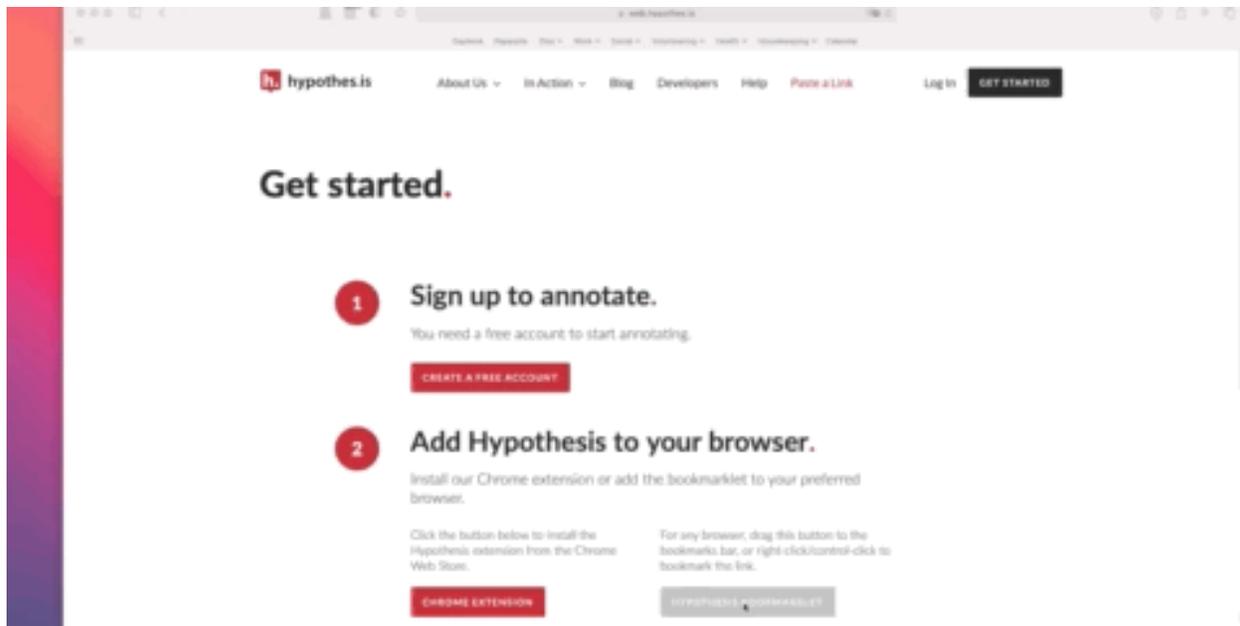
Forming Groups (such as one for your course)

1. In your Hypothes.is menu, you will find the option to select which Group you are annotating in. The default is to annotate in the General group, which is a Web-wide public annotation group.

2. You create a group in this menu by selecting "**+New Group**" and filling out prompted information including the group name. You'll be taken to the home page for the group once completed, where along the right menu will be the option to **share a link to join the group with others**. Sharing that link with students, for example, will prompt them to create a Hypothes.is account and join the private group you've created.

   Along the left are the annotations made among this group's members, Along the right is information about the group members and in the bottom right corner there is a link for inviting others to join the group:

Using Hypothes.is to annotate websites

1. On any web page, toggle Hypothes.is ON for the page by…

   —on Chrome, selecting the Hypothesis extension button, shown in the image below being toggled on:
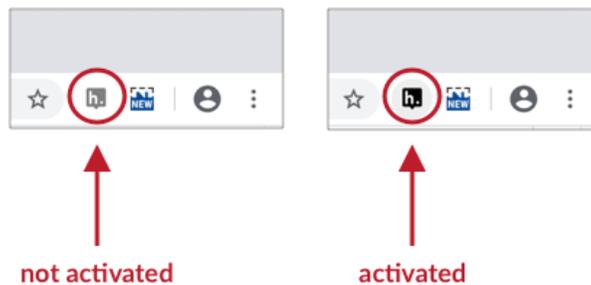
not activated   activated   or

   —on all other browsers selecting the Hypothesis Bookmarklet link you added to your favorites toolbar in the previous instruction.

For more information getting Hypothes.is toggled on and activated for a web page, you can check out their official reference, which is offered with a generous Creative Commons license (CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication).

2. Making annotations:

To make an annotation, make sure Hypothes.is menu is activated on the site you're on, and then highlight any passage of text of any length on the web page. A menu will pop up right next to what you highlighted and ask if you would like to leave an Annotation or a Highlight.

The video below demonstrates highlighting text, which them prompts the choices of Annotate and Highlight:

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3. Collaborative options for annotation

Users within the same private group will be able to see each other's annotations and reply to them, generating threads that could make for rich interactive, online, and asynchronous conversations about texts.

Users can use the Eye icon to hide other group member annotations for a cleaner view or a more solitary reading experience.

Use-Cases and Prompts

Annotate your syllabus at the beginning of the semester—to make inquiries about components of the class, respond to prompts you've left for them along the way, talk about their interests or plans, or brainstorm course topics together.

Give students feedback on their lab reports and research papers.

When you want students to annotate a course reading:

Assign students to read and annotate reading assignments before you meet, and then **use class time for peer to peer commenting** to thread their discussions. Their annotation of the text may lead to other activities or be part of an assignments' scaffolding.

Ask students to use Hypothes.is to add a specified number of original annotations and respond to 2 of their classmates' annotations. Encourage students to avoid repetition. If someone has already annotated it, students should move on to another part of the text they find interesting.

Hypothes.is can facilitate an interactive conversation about the readings in your class. **Instructors can pose specific questions** within the tool for students to engage with as they read.

You might provide students with **prompts about what to annotate**. Here are some sample instructions for annotating literary texts that Professor Cheryl Smith, Baruch College, CUNY, shares with her literature students and could be adapted for different purposes:

● Are there references to real-world places, historical events or movements, or famous people? Would knowing about or seeing images of these places, events, or people help a reader understand the text? Explain how. Please insert images whenever it's useful to do so, but be sure to avoid gratuitous use of media.

● Are there specific words or phrases that you do not know? Or are there words that are being used in a strange way—perhaps because the word meant something different in another time? How will knowing what they mean help readers? How might this knowledge shift our understanding of the text?

● Are there any interesting translation choices or effects of translation that you note and could comment on?

- Are there references to particular religious, philosophical, or political ideas? What does a little research tell you about these ideas and how they play out in and inform the reading?

- Are there references to other works of art (literature, music, visual art, or other art-forms)? So what? It's always good to include images or video to engage your readers, but remember: well-chosen media can strengthen your annotations.

- Are there references to cultural practices (like marriage, gender norms, educational practices, child-rearing, or ways of making a living) that vary according to time and place? What does your research tell you about these practices? How might knowledge of these practices illuminate a reader's experience of the text? Again, well chosen images, video, or audio can be both helpful and engaging to your readers.

- Are there particular images, words, or phrases that seem important to note, perhaps because they are ambiguous or especially suggestive? What do research and/or careful reflection suggest to you about these passages and their meaning in the larger work?

When you want students to work in groups to annotate a short course reading or part of a longer reading:

Have students work in groups to annotate different texts. After carefully reading the text, students could brainstorm, perhaps in a google doc, and collaboratively generate a list of 8-10 details, references, themes, issues, or particular lines or passages that merit further research and/or explanation through annotation. Students might then divide up this list among the group members so that each person is responsible for researching and writing a specified number of annotations on their theme or issue.

When you want students to use textual annotations as early steps toward developing a paper or research project:

The annotations students do, either individually or in groups, on course texts can be the bones of a longer, more formal writing project. Encourage students to keep their annotations in a working document and record any responses they get from classmates.

Or ask each student to choose another student's annotation that interests her/him and post a follow up response to the annotation suggesting a source or possible question to explore further.

Or select each student's most promising annotation and task them with doing more research and posting a follow-up response with their findings.

When you want students to join a public conversation about a reading relevant to your course:

Find an online text that is already annotated by Hypothes.is users at large. Encourage your students to be a part of the public conversation by choosing one annotation and posting a response.

When you want students to consider and critique other readers' annotations, even if you're not using Hypothes.is:

You can send students to Genius.com or Lit.genius.com to read a text and its annotations. Many songs and literary texts are included. Increasingly, Genius.com has "verified artists" annotating their own work, which offers unique insight into a text, if you happen to be teaching it, and into the creative or writing process more generally, which is useful even if you're not teaching that specific text or artist. For instance, Junot Diaz annotates part of his novel, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (among other works). In his annotations, Diaz remarks on the role of memory in writing and the liberties writers take in crafting metaphor and imagery, which would be useful for students in a writing or literature class to discuss. Students studying graphic design or marketing might look at the cover of Diaz's novel, which is annotated by its designer Rodrigo Corral.

Genius.com hosts many artists doing self-annotation. They range from Lena Dunham on her collection of essays to Lin-Manuel Miranda on Hamilton to many other song writers and musicians, from every genre, annotating their original songs.

For other ideas on using textual annotation for a variety of purposes in your classes, check out this post on the Hypothes.is blog.

Things to Keep in Mind

This tool is not integrated with Pratt's Canvas LMS. Using an API key may be a work around to try.

There is no dashboard detailing student engagement metrics, but you can filter the view to get a list of individual student activity and number of posts for grading purposes by selecting a student from the user list on the right of the screen.

Does not work on phones or tablets.

This tool can't annotate documents hosted on Dropbox

Google Docs need to be published to be annotated with hypothes.is. A published URL ends in /pub rather than the sharing URL which ends in /sharing.

Social annotation tools work best when you, the instructor, regularly engage with students through it.