

Running Head: Skill and Text Marking

Reading Skill and Text Marking in Introductory Psychology Courses

Kenneth E. Bell

Rivier College

and

John E. Limber

University of New Hampshire

Corresponding author:

Kenneth E. Bell

144 Eastern Avenue, Apt 203

Manchester, NH 03104

(E-mail: cionnaith@comcast.net)

Abstract

Previous research on the effect of text marking – underlining or highlighting – is inconclusive. When is it beneficial to the student? When is it detrimental? What do students actually do? Our research sought to clarify several questions about the relationship of text marking behaviors, comprehension, and course grades. We compared students of different reading skill levels who were taking introductory psychology courses. We found the lower-skilled readers report using more text-marking and actually do mark their texts more than better readers. Many low-skilled readers actually prefer to buy used, previously marked texts over new unmarked ones! We also found when these low-skilled readers mark their texts, they are less capable of determining the most relevant material as determined by course instructors who were asked to mark sampled text pages for comparison. Finally, we show that in an experimental setting, it is the lower skilled readers who are most confused by irrelevant a priori text markings. All this adds up to a destructive feedback system in which conscientious students who are weak readers can make things even worse in terms of course performance by their text marking behaviors.