Social Annotation Tools

Below is a chart comparing some of the features of two leading social annotation tools: Hypothesis and Perusall. Please note that this chart isn't exhaustive! There's more to these tools than I had time to investigate. – Derek Bruff, June 10, 2020

Other tools you might investigate: NowComment, VoiceThread, ReClipped, Socialbook.

Category	*Feature*	*Hypothesis*	*Perusall*
Overview		Great for having students annotate websites as an ungraded activity, or participating in public annotation.	Great for having students annotate files you upload and for grading annotations and sending those grades back to Brightspace.
Types of Documents	Web pages	Handles both web pages and online PDFs well. This is the kind of annotation that Hypothesis was designed to support. Note that if the web page goes away, so do the annotations.	Tries to download a copy of the web page, in case the original changes. Some problems here—the Chronicle blocked the download and the download didn't work for an online PDF. Workaround: Print the web page to PDF, then upload that PDF to Perusall.
	Uploaded files	You can't upload files directly to Hypothesis, but you can upload a file to Box and use Hypothesis there. Just make sure your students have access to the file on Box.	You can only upload PDFs, EPUBs, and source code files, but it handles these files smoothly. You can also import files directly from Dropbox.
	eReserves	It's possible that you use Hypothesis annotations with a document students access through the Libraries, but you'd	You can't use Perusall with documents accessed via Library subscriptions, although Perusall is working on an integration that might be available in the future. In the meantime, you could

		have to check for a given document if this works.	download a PDF from your Library access and upload that PDF to Perusall. This is a little dodgy from a copyright standpoint, but would probably hold up under a fair use argument. However, this deprives the Libraries of usage data on their licensed content, which they use to argue for resources.
	Textbooks	Untested, but it's likely that Hypothesis works with some online textbook platforms, since it works with Box.	Perusall has a library of over 240,000 textbooks. When you select one, it will be made available for students in your course to purchase. Just be sure you don't accidentally ask your students to purchase their textbook twice, once in Perusall and once through some other method.
Annotations	Threaded discussion	Yes, with multiple levels of threading.	Students and instructors can reply to annotations, but the discussion isn't threaded in a useful way--it's just a list of comments attached to the same highlight.
	Hashtags	Yes. You can tag an annotation, then search by tag from the group activity page.	Yes. You can tag an annotation, then search by tag from the course page.
	Mentions	Not available.	Can @-mention other readers. When you do, the mention shows up as a notification for the person you mentioned.
	Search	Can search the text of annotations.	Can search the text of annotations. Can also filter annotations (all comments, my comments, unread comments, instructor comments, and so on).
Configuration	Brightspace integration	Vanderbilt hasn't integrated Hypothesis in Brightspace yet.	By adding Perusall to your Brightspace course, you can automatically create a course within Perusall and invite your students. Instructor and student roles carry over, and there's some integration with the Brightspace gradebook.

			Instructions: ttps://support.perusall.com/hc/en-us/articles/3600339950h14. IGNORE "Initial administrative setup" on this page. FOLLOW "Setting up your course."
	Student enrollment	Once you create a private group, you can invite your students to create accounts on Hypothesis (using any email they like) and join your group.	This happens seamlessly through the Brightspace integration. Once you add Perusall to one of your content areas in Brightspace, students can click through to access your Perusall course.
	Privacy settings	Default annotations are public, but you can set up private groups and invite your students. Or have your students annotate in public, which might be useful.	When you create a Perusall course through Brightspace, it is closed to the members of your Brightspace course. There's not a way to use Perusall publicly, although you can create a "book club" and invite colleagues.
Instructor Tools	Instructor annotations	There are no distinctions between instructors and students, since everyone is just a group member.	Yes. Instructor annotations are marked differently than student annotations. Instructors can also mark a student annotation as useful, and students can flag one of their annotations as a question for their instructor.
	Assignments	Not available for Hypothesis groups.	Yes. You can assign an entire document or selections from a document. You can also set release dates and assignment deadlines. You can have student annotations appear anonymously to other students. And you can make assignments to individual students or use Perusall's group tools (available in Settings).
	Grading	Not available for Hypothesis groups.	Persuall has some sophisticated auto-grading features, including ones based on student behavior (number of annotations, time spent

			reading, etc.), responses from other students (e.g., generating replies and upvotes), and content analysis (using Perusall's algorithms).
Quirks		Doesn't seem to work while annotating PDFs in Chrome on an iPad. Group activity page shows annotation counts, but not reply counts. Somewhat confusing.	What if you wanted to have students annotate a document on their own, then annotate it together? Here's what @Perusall said on Twitter: "The best way to do that is to create an assignment for each student individually then with the same text create an assignment for the whole class or put them into manual groups!"

Further reading:

- "Social Annotation in the Digital Age," Matthew Farber, Edutopia, July 22, 2019 - https://www.edutopia.org/article/social-annotation-digital-age
- "Pandemic Pedagogy: Annotation as Close Reading," Jeremiah Coogan, Ancient Jew Review, April 26, 2020 - https://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/2020/4/24/pandemic-pedagogy-annotation-as-close-reading