Guidelines for Using Perusall

Adapted from Egbert et al., "Engagement in Digital Social Readings: Use and Perspectives" and Kraut, "The Affordances of Social Annotation in the Online Writing Classroom: A Community of Inquiry Analysis."

1. **Align with clear goals.** - Don't just assign a reading and set students loose on the text. An annotation assignment should be tied to your course- and lesson-level goals, which you make explicit to your students.
2. **Teach the tool.** - Don't assume your students know how to use Perusall or how you want them to use it. Walk them through the program and what you want them to do with it. You may want to include [this tutorial video] in your Canvas course.
3. **Provide choices.** - Whenever possible, allow for student agency by giving them a range of options in the kinds of annotations that you expect from them. Consider employing a coding scheme where each student must label their annotations with the intellectual move they are attempting (e.g. SUMMARIZE, QUESTION, INTERPRET, SUPPORT, CLARIFY, etc.)
4. **Preview the texts.** - Before students begin annotation, provide them with a summary of the text, a small number of guiding questions, key vocabulary definitions, and/or background context to the reading. This can be done in class orally, via a handout, and/or as annotations you seed throughout the text ahead of time.
5. **Decide on a structure.** - Your students need clear guidance on what they are supposed to be doing with the text and what to do when they feel stuck, whether via technical glitch or confusion over the reading.
6. **Always follow up.** - Every annotation assignment should conclude with some sort of closing/synthesizing activity, such as a synchronous classroom discussion, an instructor response to the general trends in the annotations, and/or individual student reflective writing.
7. **Participate.** - Demonstrate the intellectual moves you want students to make by seeding a small number of questions and/or comments throughout the reading. Respond when students are confused or stuck, but not so often or to such an extent that your voice dominates the conversation.
8. **Encourage peer scaffolding.** - Rather than respond to every point of confusion yourself, invite students to assist.
9. **Use groups in large classes.** - Three groups of twenty students will have a less chaotic conversation than one group of sixty. Finding the right group size for your course will take some experimentation.
10. **Choose texts carefully.** - Wherever possible start with shorter, easier texts so students can practice the skills they will need to succeed with bigger, more complex readings. Also note that not every text needs to be the subject of social annotation. Fewer readings copious time for annotation will achieve better results than rushing through many texts.
11. **Evaluate quality rather than quantity.** - Discuss with students what quality annotations look like. Write a set of guidelines with your students and/or provide a rubric for assessment.
12. **Introduce conflicting views.** - Students need to see how scholars can fruitfully disagree on an important topic. You may even want to invite a colleague as a guest annotator!
13. **Integrate social annotation into the course.** - Perusall shouldn't feel like an appendage to the main action of the course. Consider using Persuall as part of group projects, for example. Perhaps you want to start the semester by socially annotating the syllabus!