

For your summer reading assignment, you will read and annotate an entire novel. Annotating will prove invaluable as you return to school from summer break and you have to take an essay exam on the novel. Read below so that you are fully prepared to annotate an entire novel.

Note-Taking vs. Annotation

Most serious readers take notes of some kind when they are carefully considering a text, but many readers are too casual about their note-taking. Later they realize they have taken notes that are incomplete or too random, and then they laboriously start over, re-notating an earlier reading. Others take notes only when cramming for a test, which is often merely "better than nothing." Students can easily improve the depth of their reading and extend their understanding over long periods of time by developing a systematic form of annotating. Such a system is not necessarily difficult and can be completely personal and exceptionally useful.

First, what is the difference between annotating and "taking notes"? For some people, the difference is negligible. However, annotating is a way of making notes directly onto a text such as a book, a handout, or another type of publication. The advantage of having one annotated text instead of a set of note papers plus a text should be clear enough: all the information is together and inseparable, with notes very close to the text for easier understanding, and with fewer pieces to keep organized.

Think of annotations as "**showing your work**" **while you read** just as you sometimes show your work in a math problem. You are showing what you are thinking while you read and analyze— and thinking is a word-based activity, not just a nebulous puff of energy. If you can't articulate your thoughts, then you have to question if you know what you're thinking. Thinking is how you connect to the text. This, of course, requires ACTIVE participation with the text, engaging your mind while you read, not skimming the page. Furthermore, marking important sections can also be helpful in locating them quickly in discussions.

What the reader gets from annotating is a deeper initial reading and an understanding of the text that lasts. You can deliberately engage the author in conversation and questions, maybe stopping to argue, pay a compliment, or clarify an important issue—much like having a teacher or storyteller with you in the room. If and when you come back to the book, that initial interchange is recorded for you, making an excellent and entirely personal study tool.

Why Annotate?

- Annotating a text will help when you need to produce evidence that supports your knowledge or reading, such as a book on which you will be tested.

1. Yellow Highlighter

A yellow highlighter allows you to mark exactly what you are interested in. Equally important,

the yellow line emphasizes without interfering. Some people underline text and that is okay too. The idea is to see the important text more clearly.

- When you submit your completely annotated book, most of the book should have very little highlighting, as this practice doesn't require you to delve as deeply into the text.

2. Pencil

A pencil is better than a pen because you can make changes. Even geniuses make mistakes, temporary comments, and incomplete notes.

While you read, use marginalia—marginal notes—to mark key material. Marginalia can include check marks, question marks, stars, arrows, brackets, and written words and phrases.

Use the following format:

- **Inside Front Cover:** Make a major character list, writing a brief description and include page references for key scenes or moments of character development, etc.
- **Inside Back Cover:** Build a list of themes (the message the author wants you to take away from the story), allusions, images, motifs, key scenes, plot line, and epiphanies, as you read. Add page references and/or notes as well as you read. Make a list of vocabulary words on a back page or the inside back cover, if there's still room. Possible ideas for lists include the author's special jargon and new, unknown, or otherwise interesting words.
- **Ending of Each Chapter:** Provide a quick summary of what happens in the chapter. Title each chapter or section as soon as you finish it, especially if the text does not provide headings for chapters or sections.
- **Top margins:** provide plot notes—a quick few words or phrases that summarize what happens here. Go back after a chapter, scene, or assignment and then mark it carefully. (Useful for quick location of passages in discussion and for writing assignments).
- **Bottom and Side Page Margins:** Interpretive notes (see list below), questions, and/or remarks that refer to the meaning of the page. Markings or notes to tie in with notes on the inside back cover.
- **Interpretive Notes and Symbols to be used are:**
 - **Underline, circle, or highlight** key words, phrases, or sentences that are important to understanding the work.
 - Write **questions** or **comments** in the margins—your thoughts or “conversation” with the text.
- **Bracket** important ideas or passages.
 - Use Vertical lines at the margin: to emphasize a statement already underlined or bracketed
 - Connect ideas with **lines** or **arrows**.

- Use **numbers** in the margin: to indicate the sequence of points the author makes in developing a single argument.
- Use a **star or asterisk** at the margin (use a consistent symbol): to be used sparingly, to emphasize the ten or twenty most important statements in the book.
- Use **???** for sections or ideas you don't understand.
- Circle words you don't know. Define them in the margins.

Figurative Language and other elements of literature: (Some of the things you may want to mark as you notice them are):

- Use an **S for Symbols**: A symbol is a literal thing that also stands for something else, like a flag, or a cross, or fire. Symbols help to discover new layers of meaning.
 - Use an **I for Imagery**: Imagery includes words that appeal to one or more of the five senses. Close attention to imagery is important in understanding an author's message and attitude toward a subject.
 - Use an **F for Figurative Language**: Figurative language includes things like similes, metaphors, and personification. Figurative language often reveals deeper layers of meaning.
 - Use a **T for Tone**: Tone is the author's attitude conveyed through the text.
 - Use a **Th – Theme**: In literature, a theme is a broad idea in a story, or a message or lesson conveyed by a work. This message is usually about life, society or human nature. Themes explore timeless and universal ideas. Most themes are implied rather than explicitly stated.
- Plot elements (setting, mood, conflict, etc.) • Diction (effective or unusual word choice)

As you mark, you begin to notice patterns the author has or where he or she deviates from a pattern and much of the work of a critical or analytical reader is noticing these patterns and variations. Notice that annotations are meant to be more than a "scavenger hunt" for literary techniques and rhetorical devices. Along with marking these you should comment on the effectiveness or significance of the device. It's great if you can detect alliteration in a passage, but that in and of itself is useless unless you can tell that this alliteration demonstrates the mental breakdown of the character, for example. It's amazing if you recognize the hubris of a character, but how does this instance differ from those occurring previously in the novel?

3. Your Text

Inside the front cover of your book, keep an orderly, legible list of "key information" with page references. Key information in a novel might include themes; passages that relate to the book's title; characters' names; salient quotes; important scenes, passages, and chapters; and maybe key definitions or vocabulary. Remember that key information will vary according to genre and the reader's purpose, so make your own good plan.

***Adapted from "An Annotation Guide: How and Why to Annotate a Book" by Nick Otten and Ms. Baulch's AP Literature Course*