

How to Annotate a Text

Marking and highlighting a text is like having a conversation with a book – it allows you to ask questions, comment on meaning, and mark events and passages you want to revisit.

Below are some suggestions that will help with annotating.

- Use a pen, pencil, post-it notes, or a highlighter (although use it sparingly!).
- Summarize important ideas in your own words.
- Add examples from real life, other books, TV, movies, and so forth.
- Define words that are new to you.
- Mark passages that you find confusing with a ???
- Write questions that you might have for later discussion in class.
- Comment on the actions or development of characters.
- Comment on things that intrigue, impress, surprise, disturb, etc.
- *Note how the author uses language. A list of possible literary devices is attached.*
- *Note symbolism, motifs, themes*
- Draw a picture when a visual connection is appropriate
- Explain the historical context or traditions/social customs used in the passage.
- **Diction** (word choice): the denotative and connotative meanings of words
 - different words for the same thing often suggest different attitudes (e.g., happy vs. content)
 - denotative vs. connotative (e.g., dead vs. passed away)
- **Images:** Vivid appeals to understanding through the five senses
- **Details:** Facts that are included or those that are omitted
- **Language:** The overall use of language such as formal, clinical, informal, slang, syntactical structure
- **Sentence Structure:** How the author's use of sentence structure affects the reader

Suggested methods for marking a text:

- * Use sticky notes if you cannot write in the book
- * Color code your annotations by using different color post-its, highlighters, or pens.
- * Use brackets if several lines seem important, just draw a line down the margin and underline/highlight only the key phrases.
- * Place an asterisk (*) next to an important passage; use two if it is really important.
- * Use the space in the margins to make comments, define words, ask questions, etc. (marginal notetaking)
- *Underline/highlight: Caution! Do not underline or highlight too much! You want to concentrate on the important elements, not entire pages (use brackets for that).
- *Use circles, boxes, triangles, squiggly lines, stars, etc. to mark important elements such as figurative language

Literary Term Definitions:

1. Alliteration – the practice of beginning several consecutive or neighboring words with the same consonant sound: e.g., “The twisting trout twinkled below.”

2. Allusion – a reference to something outside the text such as a mythological, literary, or historical person, place, or thing to make a connection for the reader: e.g., “He met his Waterloo.”
3. Flashback – a scene that interrupts the action of a work to show a previous event.
4. Foreshadowing – the use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest future action
5. Hyperbole – a deliberate, extravagant, and often outrageous exaggeration; it may be used for either serious or comic effect: e.g., “The shot heard ‘round the world.”
6. Idiom – an accepted phrase or expression having a meaning different from the literal: e.g., to drive someone up the wall.
7. Imagery – the words or phrases a writer uses that appeal to the senses.
8. Irony – there are three types; -

Verbal irony – when a speaker or narrator says one thing while meaning the opposite; sarcasm is a form of verbal irony: e.g., “It is easy to stop smoking. I’ve done it many times.”

Situational irony -- when a situation turns out differently from what one would normally expect; often the twist is oddly appropriate: e.g., a deep sea diver drowning in a bathtub is ironic.

Dramatic irony – when a character or speaker says or does something that has different meaning from what he or she thinks it means, though the audience and other characters understand the full implications: e.g., Anne Frank looks forward to growing up, but we, as readers, know that it will never be.

9. Metaphor – a comparison of two unlike things not using “like” or “as”: e.g., “Time is money.”
10. Mood – the atmosphere or predominant emotion in a literary work.
11. Oxymoron – a form of paradox that combines a pair of opposite terms into a single unusual expression: e.g., “sweet sorrow” or “cold fire.”
12. Paradox – occurs when the elements of a statement contradict each other. Although the statement may appear illogical, impossible, or absurd, it turns out to have a coherent meaning that reveals a hidden truth: e.g., “Much madness id divinest sense.”
13. Personification – a kind of metaphor that gives inanimate objects or abstract ideas human characteristics: e.g., “The wind cried in the dark.”
14. Rhetoric – the art of using words to persuade in writing or speaking.
15. Simile – a comparison of two different things or ideas using words such as “like” or “as”: e.g., “The warrior fought like a lion.”
16. Suspense – a quality that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events.
17. Symbol – any object, person, place, or action that has both a meaning in itself and that stands for something larger than itself, such as a quality, attitude, belief, or value: e.g., a tortoise represents slow but steady progress.
18. Theme – the central message of a literary work. It is expressed as a sentence or general statement about life or human nature. A literary work can have more than one theme, and most themes are not directly stated but are implied: e.g., pride often precedes a fall.
19. Tone – the writer’s or speaker’s attitude toward a subject, character, or audience; it is conveyed through the author’s choice of words (diction) and details. Tone can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, indignant, etc.
20. Understatement (meiosis, litotes) – the opposite of hyperbole. It is a kind of irony that deliberately represents something as being much less than it really is: e.g., “I could probably manage to survive on a salary of two million dollars per year.”

