

ANNOTATING

Your New Best Friend



Annotation is...

Reading is not passive. Ever. Never ever. When you read, you must read actively and interactively. When you let your mind wander, you miss details. And when you miss details, you often miss the point. Therefore, we annotate.

an·no·tate

/ an·no·tat·ed, an·no·tat·ing, an·no·tates

To furnish (a literary work) with critical commentary or explanatory notes; gloss.

When you read, you must annotate. Make notes in the margins, while underlining or highlighting key information. This will help you to remember the pertinent details in a text.

Proper annotation requires **close reading**. Close reading means reading word for word, sentence by sentence, line by line. It means paying close attention to how words, sentences, and even punctuation contribute to meaning. Assume that every word you read carries meaning. Your job is to find it.

How to Annotate

When reading a text, do the following:

- Have a pen and pencil and highlighter and ruler and ink well nearby. Be wary of HI syndrome (“highlight everything”)
- Underline sentences that stand out as important
- Write “summary” notes in the margins—never go more than a paragraph or two without writing down *something* in the margins

What to Look for

When reading a text, look for the following:

- The thesis statement (implicit or explicit)
- Phrases which sum up important ideas
- Key terms, which the writer/speaker will often repeat
- New vocabulary words—underline them, look them up, and write the definitions in the margins
- Rhetorical and stylistic devices; note their effectiveness
- Changes in syntax and diction
- Especially interesting, well-written passages
- Questions you have about a point or passage
- Your responses to a specific point or passage
- Phrases or passages that embody the writer’s style
- Unclear or ineffective phrases, passages, or examples
- The tone of the piece

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What are the central claims of the writer? What is the main point or thesis?
- What evidence does the writer offer to present this message?
- How does the author use ethos, pathos, and logos?
- What is the purpose of the text?
- What kind of reasoning is the writer using? What is the strategy?
- How does the writer's strategy suit his or her subject or purpose?
- What, if anything, is remarkable about the writer's use of the strategy?
- How effective is the text? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the writing?
- Using the SOAPSTONE acronym can be very helpful
 - Subject
 - Occasion
 - Audience
 - Purpose
 - Speaker
 - Tone

The End Goal

The end goal of annotation is to learn to *read and think critically*. To read critically is to make judgements about how a text is argued. This is a highly reflective skill requiring you to “stand back” and gain some distance from the text you are reading. You might have to read a text *more than once* to get a basic grasp of the content before you launch into an intensive critical reading.