

# Guidelines for Annotating a Text

Annotation is a key component of *close reading*. Since we will annotate texts all year, you need to develop a system that works for you (within the following guidelines). Effective annotating is both economical and consistent. The techniques are almost limitless. Use any *combination* of the following:

- Make brief comments in the margins. Use any white space available - inside cover, random blank pages
- Make brief comments between or within lines of the text. Do not be afraid to mark within the text itself. In fact, you must.
- Circle or put boxes, triangles, or clouds around words or phrases.
- Use abbreviations or symbols - brackets, stars, exclamation points, question marks, numbers, etc.
- Connect words, phrases, ideas, circles, boxes, etc. with lines or arrows.
- \*Underline – CAUTION: Use this method sparingly. Underline only a few words. **Always combine** with another method such as comment. Never underline an entire passage. Doing so takes too much time and loses effectiveness. If you wish to mark an entire paragraph or passage, draw a line down the margin or use brackets.
- \*Highlight – See *underline*. You cannot write with a highlighter anyway.
- Create your own code.
- Use post-it notes **only** if you have exhausted all available space (unlikely).

## Close Reading:

What should you annotate? Again, the possibilities are limitless. Keep in mind the reasons we annotate. Your annotations **must** include comments. I want to see evidence of thinking.

- Have a conversation with the text. Talk back to it.
- **Ask questions (essential to active reading).**
- Comment on the actions or development of a character. Does the character change? Why? How? The result?
- Comment on something that intrigues, impresses, amuses, shocks, puzzles, disturbs, repulses, aggravates, etc.
- Comment on lines / quotations you think are especially significant, powerful, or meaningful.
- Express agreement or disagreement.
- Summarize key events. Make predictions.
- Connect ideas to each other or to other texts.
- Note if you experience an epiphany.
- Note anything you would like to discuss or do not understand.
- Note how the author uses language. Note the significance if you can.
- effects of word choice (diction) or sentence structure or type (syntax)
- point of view
- repetition of words, phrases, actions, events - patterns motifs or cluster ideas
- Are there objects in the piece that may be symbolic? Of what? Why?
- irony, imagery
- contrasts / contradictions / juxtapositions / shifts themes
- Check out the setting. Is it symbolic? Is it described with any weird, unique, or unusual diction choices?
- any other figure of speech or literary device symbols

The most common complaint about annotating is that it slows down your reading. Yes, it does. That's the point. If annotating as you read annoys you, read a chapter, then go back and annotate. Reading a text a second time is preferable anyway.

Approach the works with an open mind. Let them inspire you and stretch your imagination.