



Active Reading: The Art of Annotation

We do not read books in this class; we study literature! At an academic level, it is not enough for you to passively read the words on a page. You must think about words, question ideas, interact with the text, engage with the author, hold conversations and CREATE...

To succeed in life, you will need to be a proficient reader. One way to strengthen your reading skills is to closely read the texts we study. Reading is not a race—slow down. The next step is to **annotate the text**. I expect you to annotate EVERY text that we read! But, what is annotation? Dictionary.com states that to annotate means “to supply with critical or explanatory notes; comment upon in notes.” This means that while you are reading, you will be taking notes within the text. No more curling up on the couch or lying in bed, passively reading; you should have a pen/pencil in hand and be free from other distractions. Unlike “highlighting” alone, which is a passive activity, the process of annotating text helps you to stay focused and involved with the text. Soon you will be concentrating as you read and retaining more information, which will help to improve your comprehension and analysis.

It would be **a good idea to purchase the texts each time we read a new book!** If you do not purchase the books, you will need to find a different way to annotate in the school’s books, perhaps by using small **post-it notes**. Occasionally, I may conduct an “annotation check” which will be counted as a quiz grade.

Becoming an Active Reader Through Annotation

Three main things to consider: decide on the author’s most important points, identify how they fit together, and show how you feel about them.

- To annotate: underline, highlight, or flag passages that stand out to you in some way. Make written notes in the margins to connect ideas or make note of important passages. Also make note of specific details that support a main idea or literary theme, and identify your reactions to specific passages (if applicable).
- Although the more specific your marks, the better it will be when you write your essays, the downfall to annotating is that many people underline or highlight too much! Try to avoid this pitfall. **Remember, annotate according to your purpose!**

Consider the following questions as you read:

Landsberger, Joe. “Reading Critically.” *Study Guides and Strategies*. Web. 20 Aug. 2010.

- Ⓢ What initial topics or questions are raised for me, the reader?
- Ⓢ What issues are addressed in the reading?
- Ⓢ What conclusions does the author reach about the issue(s)?
- Ⓢ What are the author’s reasons for his or her assertions?
- Ⓢ Are there passages that stick out in the reading selection? Why does this passage stick out (ask this question for each passage)?

Suggestions for annotating include the following:

- Label and interpret literary devices (metaphor, simile, imagery, personification, symbol, alliteration, metonymy, synecdoche, etc.) and elements of style (tone, diction, syntax, narrative pace, use of figurative language, etc.)
- Identify themes, main ideas, supportive details and/or evidence that lead the reader to a conclusion about the text
- Summarize what you read (minimally)
- Write questions
- Converse with the author
- Make connections to other texts or experiences

Sample annotated text:

repetition; shows how angry he is;
can't think straight

choppy logic—
doesn't make sense

Capulet: How, how, how, how, choplogic? What is this?

He mimicks {
her-- see {
her previous {
lines {

“Proud” — and “I thank you” — and “I thank you not” —

And yet “not proud”? Mistress minion you,

Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,
But fettle your fine joints ‘gainst Thursday next
To go with Paris to Saint Peter’s Church, “get yourself ready”

Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither,

“picked up” in {
carts in the {
the streets and {
carried to prison {

Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage!

You tallow-face!

criminals were

alliteration

servant

“get yourself ready”

connotation

dead, decaying flesh

pale; anemic looking

metaphors

note degrading terms — servant, criminal, baggage; views daughter as property, something that can be thrown away