

A Reader's Guide to Annotation

Marking and highlighting a text is like having a **conversation with the book**—it allows you to ask questions, comment on meaning, and mark passages that evoke deeper thoughts or remind you to revisit them. Annotating is a permanent record of your intellectual conversation with the text.

Laying the foundation: A Resource and Planning Guide for Pre-AP English

As you work with your text, think about all the ways you can connect with what you are reading. What follows are some suggestions for what you may find in any given piece of literature.

Plan on reading most passages, if not everything, **twice**. The first time, read for overall meaning and impressions. The second time, read more carefully.

Use a **RED** pen to annotate.

- Underline, circle, highlight, etc. / **ALWAYS COMMENT TO SHOW WHY YOU MARKED THE PASSAGE**
- Summarize important ideas in your own words
- Add examples from real life, other books, films, and so forth
- Define words that are new to you
- Draw lines between connected points / comment
- Write questions about passages that confuse or intrigue you
- Write thought-provoking questions or comments
- Comment on the descriptions, the actions, or the development of the characters
- Comment on how the author uses language. A list of possible literary devices is attached.
- Feel free to draw a picture when a visual connection is appropriate
- Explain the historical context or traditions/social customs used in the passage

Suggested Literary Devices

- Alliteration: the practice of beginning several consecutive or neighboring words with the same sound: e.g. "The **t**wisting **t**rount **t**winkled below"
- Allusion: a reference to a mythological, literary, or historical person, place, or thing: e.g. "He met his **Waterloo**"
- Flashback: a scene that interrupts the action of a work to show a previous event
- Foreshadowing: hints or clues in a narrative to suggest future

action

- 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."
- Idiom: an accepted phrase or expression having a meaning different from the literal: e.g. to drive someone up the wall
- Imagery: words or phrases a writer uses to appeal to the senses: e.g. "The sky was **periwinkle blue** with a **few scattered, wispy** clouds."
- Irony: there are three types
 - verbal irony: while the 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 a twist; e.g. a deep sea diver drowning in a bathtub is an ironic situation
 - dramatic irony: when a character or speaker says or does something that has a 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.
- Metaphor: a comparison of two unlike things not using 'like' or 'as': e.g. Time is money.
- Mood: the atmosphere or predominant emotion in a literary work
- Oxymoron: a form of paradox that combines a pair of opposite terms into a single unusual expression: e.g. "sweet sorrow" or "cold fire"
- 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 is divinest sense." (something that may be called madness by an unthinking mob, may actually be a profound truth)
- Personification: a kind of metaphor that gives inanimate objects or abstract ideas human characteristics: e.g. "The **wind cried** in the dark"
- Rhetoric: the art of using words to persuade in writing or speaking
- Simile: a comparison of two unlike things or ideas using words 'like' or 'as': e.g. "The **warrior** fought **like a lion**."
- Suspense: a quality that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events
- 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**

- **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
- **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.
- **Understatement** (meiosis, litote): 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."

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Suggested method for marking the text:

- If you are a person who does not like to write in a book, you may want to invest in a supply of post-it notes
- If you feel really creative or are just super organized, you can even color-code your annotations by using different color post-its, highlighters, markers, pens, etc.