



Annotation Guide Grades 9-12

Your English teachers get it: you do not want to mark up your book. Or perhaps you feel like underlining “random things” in a text is a waste of your time. The act of annotating a text, however, involves so much more than simple highlighting. Annotation actually saves you time, as it ultimately assists you in your ability to discuss (and therefore write about) the texts that you read.

Annotating or highlighting can be a record of a reader’s intellectual conversation with the text.

Annotating can help a serious reader keep track of patterns, contrasts, plot events, and character development. It can assist a student in studying for a test or writing a paper that requires the use of quotations to support ideas. Students who learn to highlight and annotate become active readers and recursive thinkers who notice patterns, symbolic elements, and contrasts almost effortlessly as they absorb the text.

Highlighting and annotating a text is like having a conversation with a book—it allows the active reader to ask questions, comment on meaning, and mark events and passages s/he wants to revisit later. The annotation of a text can take place during a reading, a lecture, or a discussion that is focused on a certain poem or passage. The advantage of marking the actual text is obvious—you will never lose your notes and your thoughts will be readily available.

- Students, then, should learn how to mark, highlight, and annotate a text to discern patterns, contrasts, and relationships. When readers first begin to highlight and annotate in order to organize their understanding of a text, they may wish to begin by following these simple guidelines.
- Inside the front cover of the book, list any annotation symbols that you use. For example, if you decide to highlight all unfamiliar words in blue, write in the front cover, “blue highlighter = unfamiliar words.” If helpful, also list characters as you encounter them.
- Also, in the front cover of your book, make a list of subjects that the book explores. For each of these subjects, think about what the author is trying to get you to understand. That will be the author’s theme (or message) about that subject.
- If the text has an epigraph, mark that page. An epigraph suggests the text’s tone or theme; refer to it often as you read.

- Underline, circle, or highlight (hint: choose one and consistently use it) any unfamiliar words. Define these words as you mark them, and write these definitions (in your own words, preferably) in the margin.
- When new characters are introduced highlight phrases that describe them.
- Underline or highlight (hint: again, choose one and remain consistent) any literary devices that you encounter. This list may include: diction, imagery, details, syntax, similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration (assonance *and* consonance), allusions, hyperbole, polysyndeton, asyndeton, irony, paradox, foreshadowing, and/or symbolism. Then, in the margin beside your marked word, phrase, or sentence, write brief notes about how this device contributes to your understanding of the text. Does this device help contribute to tone or theme? Understanding of character? Why did the author choose to include it? What connections can you make to the text or other texts that you have read?
- Highlight or underline anything that intrigues, disturbs, impresses, or surprises you. Come up with a symbol for each, as this symbol will help you in understanding why you underlined that word, phrase, sentence, or passage (for example, you could choose to use a heart to denote portions of a text that impress you and an exclamation mark to denote anything that surprises you).
- Finally, choose **at least** two passages that you feel are essential to the text. You may feel that they reveal something crucial about the character, or perhaps these passages highlight the text's theme. Whatever your reasoning, bracket these passages and place a sticky note on these pages so that you can find them quickly.
- Other helpful tips: When you get an idea while reading the text, note it in a brief form in the margin. You may never think of this idea again unless you write it down. Use parentheses, brackets, checks, stars, bullets, or asterisks to mark very important items or things you want to come back to later. Simply highlighting or underlining text without accompanying commentary is meaningless.
- If you still refuse to write in your books, you need to make sure that you have plenty of sticky notes.
- Caution! Do not **highlight** the entire book. Concentrate on the important elements. If you mark *everything*, nothing will stand out.