

## UNDERSTANDING HOW TO ANNOTATE

(During the first reading, only use a pen or pencil - no highlighters!)

“Interacting” is a funny way to think about how you read a book, but most educational researchers agree that interacting with what you read (writing down your thoughts, asking questions, responding to the words you read, and so on) is the best way to understand and find meaning in a book. Annotation is just that: interacting with your text and finding meaning in what you read as you read it.

When possible, write your annotations on the pages as you read. If that’s not possible, write your annotations on a Post-it note and stick in on the pages. You can also take a photo of your notes and we can save it in a PDF file for future review.

Ideally, you will annotate while you read and after you read. You will know how to annotate in the following ways...and understand how annotating activates your learning and helps you transfer knowledge into understanding.

### WHILE YOU READ

....for all texts/books

There are lots of ways to interact with what you read, all of which involve recording your thoughts (in your packet or on a Post-it) as they pop into your head. Here are some ideas to get you going...

**Ask questions**—Are you confused about something? Write the question down. You might find the answer later, or you might get an opportunity to ask a classmates or teacher.

**React to what you read**—maybe you just read something that made you mad, startled you, or brought you to tears. Write down your reaction to the text so you remember it later.

**Give an opinion**—Do you like or dislike an idea? Do you think the author is too boring? Record this opinion next to the passage that inspired it.

**Locate important passages**—Is there a quote that you think is important or thoughtful? Is there an idea you think might be worth remembering? Is there a ‘big idea’ that is at the foundation of the article? These are important to locate, as they are what you might quote in your investigation or written essay later.

**Make connections**—Maybe something you read reminds you of an experience you’ve had or parallels a part of your life; record these connections and they will help you find meaning and relevancy in what you read.

**Define new words**—Too often, reading comprehension problems occur because readers don’t understand words. It’s not too much trouble to look up the word in the classroom dictionary or your phone. If you physically can’t look the word up as you encounter it, highlight it in the moment and look it up at your first opportunity.

...for reading literature

**Track literary devices**—If you notice a reoccurring theme/symbol/idea/object (motifs) as you read, start noting the theme when it takes place. Doing so will help you understand the message that the text is trying to convey:

### SIFTT Annotating

**S – Symbols:** A symbol is a literal thing that also stands for something else, like a flag, or a cross, or fire. Symbols help to discover new layers of meaning.

**I – Imagery:** Imagery includes words that appeal to one or more of the five senses. Close attention to imagery is important in understanding an author’s message and attitude toward a subject.

**F – Figurative Language:** Figurative language includes things like similes, metaphors, and personification. Figurative language often reveals deeper layers of meaning.

**T – Tone:** Tone is the overall mood of a piece of literature. Tone can carry as much meaning to the story as the plot does.

**T – Theme:** In literature, a theme is a broad idea in a story, or a message or lesson conveyed by a work. This message is usually about life, society or human nature. Themes explore timeless and universal ideas. Most themes are implied rather than explicitly stated.

**AFTER YOU READ (Review/Second reading: point where you can start highlighting)**

You might think the best thing to do when you’ve finished your assigned reading is file it away in your folder or locker. But if you really want to understand the text, consider these ideas to help you make sense of what you’ve read...

**Title your chapters or article sections**—Some books and articles have chapter titles already. If they don’t, go back and give them relevant titles when you finish reading the section. Doing so will help you remember what was discussed in that part of the article.

**Summarize what you’ve read**—In the empty space at the end of a page, rewrite the article noting the essential points, using only a couple of sentences. You might find that doing so will help you understand what you just read.

**Respond to what you’ve read**—Sometimes a summary isn’t enough. You might want to comment on what you just read, give an opinion about a concept, or complain about the author’s insight/viewpoint.

**Make a prediction**—Predicting is a great thinking exercise. There’s not a better place to do so than after you’ve read one section and before you begin the next. You might be surprised to find your prediction is right or wrong.

You might be asking yourself, “How do I know if I am annotating enough?” Considering that everyone reads (and annotates) differently, this question is difficult to answer. Because annotating helps assess understanding though, you should find a system that explores many levels of transfer and reflection.

Balance and flexibility of strategies has always been key to finding success with annotating. You may choose to write a lot of notes while you read and a minimal amount after you read.

Oppositely, you might write whole paragraphs in the space after each section, and find only a few noteworthy moments while you are reading the section. Either is fine so long as you balance these options appropriately.

Lastly, remember that, even though annotation can feel like a burden, it’s an important part of understanding what you read. Choosing not to do so is choosing to reject a strategy that will help you become a more thoughtful and thorough reader.