

## What is annotating and why is it an essential skill to close reading?

Annotating is a permanent record of your conversation with the text. Through marking the text and writing notes, it's a way for you to interact with, talk back to, and join in the conversation with the author and the work he or she created.

**There is no one way to annotate a text. It can involve any of the following:**

- *summarizing a passage or chunk of paragraphs*
- *paraphrasing difficult text into your own words--simple, easy-to-understand language*
- *recording questions that enter your mind as you read*
- *defining vocabulary, terms, or references to help you comprehend the text*
- *marking sentences or word choices that you feel are significant*
- *identifying important moments in the plot, such as conflict and tension*
- *figuring out the point of view of the story*
- *commenting on info about characters and how they change*
- *connecting the text to your life, pop culture, society, history*
- *noting details about the setting, time period, culture, world of the story*
- *analyzing the author's craft—figurative language, literary devices, description, how the text is organized, sentence structure, tone, mood, word choice, style, etc.*
- *predicting what may happen next*
- *drawing pictures to help you better visualize something in the text*
- *charting your own reading comprehension—marking places that confuse you that you need to reread, further break down, or discuss*
- *marking writing, ideas, or choices the writer makes that intrigue, delight, disturb, surprise, or move you*
- *recognizing big picture thematic ideas that emerge from the text*

But doesn't this slow the reading down? Yes, absolutely! Because annotating forces you to put on the breaks and drive slowly, you are far more likely to notice the scenery and uncover ideas that would not have surfaced otherwise. As students, many of us have mastered the art of surface or fake reading. Annotating helps thwart our scheme to merely skim and fake read.

**Other benefits of annotating:**

- *increases the likelihood that we will retain and be able to recall information from the text*
- *makes it much easier to write about or discuss a text because we have notes to draw from*
- *forces us to be active and alert readers, rather than passive and disengaged readers. (This is especially important when we're reading something we don't like or find boring.)*
- *eliminates or greatly reduce the "I read it but I totally didn't get it" problem*
- *helps us stay awake and focused when we're totally exhausted but need to read*



It's important that you create an annotating system that works best for you, but here are some suggestions for possible symbols. Remember, simply making marks and drawing symbols is **not** annotating; it's the notes and comments you make in the margins that create the conversation. (See the "Accident" annotating example on next page)

<b>Possible Symbol</b>	<b>What the symbol indicates and what you will write in the margin beside the text you have marked</b>
[ ]	bracket <b>vocabulary, terms, or references</b> that you don't know. Look up the word/term and define it in the margin. Make sure you've chosen the definition the writer used—context is important.
<u>      </u>	Underline or highlight something in the text you find <b>important</b> —perhaps a significant inference/conclusion you've made. <i>Don't overuse underlining or highlighting or these marks become meaningless.</i> Explain why the word/phrase/sentence is significant.
○	Think of this as a head, and use this symbol when you're making a note about a <b>character</b> . <i>With multiple characters, you may want to put the character's initials inside the circle, so when you go back it's easy to find your notes on a specific character.</i>
□	Think of a box as a house and use this symbol to denote a place where you're learning something about the <b>setting</b> —the world of the story ( <i>the type of neighborhood, house, community, the story's time period, cultural setting, etc.</i> )
?	Use this to mark a place where the text makes you <b>pose a question</b> , make a <b>prediction</b> , question a character's motive or decision, or even a choice made by the writer. Record the question in the margin.
??	Use this mark when there's something in the text that <b>confuses</b> you, where you notice your reading comprehension breaking down. Try to write down specifically what it is you're confused about. This can denote a place in the text to come back to for clarification.
><	See this as two opposing forces about to collide—perhaps two angry birds. Use this marker to denote an <b>external conflict</b> . ( <i>A character wants something, but someone else is an obstacle; a tornado threatens people's lives; zombies attack a town</i> )
◻><	This is a conflict inside a box, so use it to denote an <b>internal conflict</b> —a character facing an emotional conflict. ( <i>A guy wants to ask a girl out, but the obstacle is his shyness; a person's hot temper is an obstacle for him or her on a job; a character's sadness over a tragedy prevents him or her from enjoying a celebration.</i> )
¢	This is the actual symbol for cents—as in .50 in change. There's also that letter "C" so this is great marker for when you observe a <b>character has changed</b> — <i>whether it's a change in his or her mood, attitude, maturity, beliefs, decision, self confidence, etc.</i>
}	Use this to mark a sentence or passage that is especially tricky—where you need to <b>paraphrase</b> and translate it into your own words, using simple, every day, plain language.
⤿	This kind of looks like macaroni used to make cheesy craft projects, like a necklace, so use it when marking something you notice about <b>the writer's craft</b> ( <i>figurative language; a syntax choice such as a very short sentence after many long ones or a fragment; rhetorical devices, like parallel structure; imagery; specific descriptive words, etc.</i> )
#	Think about the hashtag of Twitter, a social media tool used to connect and share our ideas with the world. Use this symbol to mark places in the text that you <b>connect</b> to your life, a friend, a movie, a current event, etc. Or use it when you notice a <b>text's theme</b> —what the writer is observing about life and how people often behave.