

What is the point of annotation?

- Annotation encourages you to read actively and thoughtfully.
- Annotation provides you with a useful overview to consult before discussions or writing assignments.

Every text is a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of its work.

----- novelist Umberto Eco

Ideas for annotating literature

- Use a pen so you can make circles, brackets, and notes. If you like highlighters, use one for key passages, but don't get carried away and don't only highlight.
- Look for patterns and label them (motifs, diction, symbols, images, behavior, whatever).
- Mark passages that seem to jump out at you because they suggest an important idea or theme—or for any other reason (an arresting figure of speech or image, an intriguing sentence pattern, a striking example of foreshadowing, a key moment in the plot, a bit of dialogue that reveals character, clues about the setting, etc.).
- Mark things that puzzle, intrigue, please or displease you. Ask questions, make comments—talk back to the text.
- At the ends of chapters or sections, write a bulleted list of key plot events. This not only forces you to think about what happened, see it whole, and identify patterns—but you create a convenient record of the whole work.
- Circle words you want to learn or words that jump out at you for some reason. If you don't want to stop reading, guess, then look the word up and jot down a relevant meaning later. You need not write out a full dictionary definition; it is often helpful to put the relevant meaning in your own words. If SAT prep has dampened your enthusiasm, rediscover the joy of adding to your “word hoard,” as the Beowulf poet calls it.
- The Harvard College Library has posted an excellent guide to annotation, “Interrogating Texts: Six Reading Habits to Develop in Your First Year at Harvard.”
(http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/lamont_handouts/interrogatingtexts.html)