ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Inside cover of David Wallace's annotated copy of Don DeLillo's *Players*. Harry Ransom Center. Permission pending. http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/press/releases/2010/dfw/books/

Annotation Tips
A Guide to Using the Student Resource

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

When students learn how to read closely, they must be guided through the process of how to annotate the text under study. Only through modeling and guided practice will annotation become a valuable part of a student's close reading routine. Students profit from annotation in several ways, but the notation of textual evidence to be included in oral or written defense of assertions is one of the most obvious.

For students in middle grades, annotation may be a new skill, so it will be important that teachers provide a clear focus for annotation. Giving instructions to annotate for one or two specific targets will help students focus their reading and make the task more manageable. The student resource lists both basic and advanced elements for annotation. For middle grade or inexperienced students it might be best to focus on the first seven elements before moving on to looking for more advanced elements, such as syntax or sound devices.

For high school students who have been annotating on a regular basis, the student resource may offer them a reminder of elements to pay attention to in their reading. Teachers may want to give a specific list of elements to read for or they may want to let students explore the text on their own, discovering patterns for themselves.

For style analysis with fictional texts, students in all grades will most likely be reading to discover the meaning/theme of the text, the tone or mood, or how the author crafts character. The students may be focusing on literary devices such as

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diction, detail, imagery, or figurative language. Noticing conflict or setting may unlock some answers for them, or a close study of syntax may provide clues to a deeper understanding of the text.

In the study of nonfiction, one of the concepts that students must master is author's purpose. Writers of nonfiction may be writing for a variety of purposes: to persuade, to inform, to narrate, or to describe. Analysis of nonfiction should begin with an understanding of the purpose of the text. Rhetorical analysis, like style analysis, begins with close reading and annotation. Students should become comfortable with reading for elements such as details, imagery, diction, comparisons/contrasts. Students may also be directed to study the organization of the text, the rhetorical appeals, or other devices of rhetoric.

And while the focus may be different for fiction and nonfiction texts, the process is the same.

Whatever the task, finding patterns unlocks meaning and purpose in both nonfiction and fiction.

This resource is included in Module 1: *Elevating Instructional Rigor*.

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TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

While it will often be necessary to use "sticky" notes for annotation, it is important for students to have opportunities to annotate directly on the text. Therefore, if possible, provide students with copies of a passage for annotation. The ability to "mark up" the page is an important element of seeing the patterns that students uncover through their close reading. If you provide the passage, wider margins should be used to provide adequate space.

Depending on the grade level and ability level of students, select only two or three elements for annotation from the student resource in order to focus students on specific skills. When students are new to annotation, they should work in pairs or cooperative learning groups to gain confidence in the newly acquired skill.

Students can begin by looking for common patterns such as patterns of imagery (dark/light, time, nature), words with similar or contrasting denotations or connotations, figurative language, repetition of types of phrases, sentence structure (long, complex sentences followed by a short simple sentence), active/passive voice.

Remind and reinforce with students the idea that annotation goes beyond merely identifying devices and includes linking the devices to meaning.

Suggestions for annotation activities:
- Students begin a close reading task by reading the text silently or aloud, depending on text complexity and learning objectives, and writing a short summary of what they have read.
- Provide a reading or writing prompt that focuses students' annotation on a specific abstract concept such as theme, tone, or purpose.

- Direct students to annotate for specific devices and the effect of those devices. Students will be more successful if their annotation efforts are focused on only two or three devices.
  - o Make laminated cards with a specific element on each and hand the cards out to groups as a way to divide the annotation tasks.
- Depending on students' experience with annotation, use one of the following strategies:
  - o Complete the first annotation together with the whole class, modeling the critical thinking involved in looking for patterns and contrasts and connecting devices to meaning.
  - o Have students annotate the passage together in small groups or pairs.
  - o Have students annotate the passage individually.

Ask several students to share responses and then discuss the varying responses and the logic behind the students' annotations. Either individually or as a class, students can create an assertion about the abstract topic of the annotation (theme, tone, or purpose). Project this statement of purpose for the class and ask students what they think the statement means. This statement can be turned into a thesis statement for an analytical essay.

All annotation does not have to lead to a writing assignment; however, it is a sound practice to have students write thesis statements to address a prompt whenever possible.

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Annotation Tips
Student Resource

> **Annotation**: the act of adding notes of explanation to a text

Annotating as you read makes you pay closer attention to text. When you write notes of explanation, you can get a sense of your own understanding, and it leaves a permanent record of your thinking to aid you in further study. As you become more skilled in annotating texts, you will begin to notice patterns, contrasts, and symbolic elements that you might have previously missed when reading independently.

When practicing **close reading**, begin by reading the passage and writing a short summary of what you've read. Writing a summary will help you identify the main ideas and ensure that you have a working understanding of what you've just read.

Go back and re-read the passage, looking either for specific elements that you know are in the text or for patterns of images, words, ideas, etc.

Remember that simply identifying elements is NOT ENOUGH—**you must include some explanation of how the element creates a deeper understanding of the text**.

You can mark your text in a variety of ways. Highlighting, circling, or underlining, as well as using a box, [brackets], (parentheses), and asterisks * are all ways you can identify different elements in your annotation. However you choose to mark your texts, the notes you write in the margins should connect what you have marked to effect or meaning.

The list below contains suggestions for annotating for specific literary elements.

Basic elements to look for in all texts:

A. Mark any **details** that have a definite effect. Think about why the author includes these details. Note the importance of the details in the margin.

B. Mark any **connotative diction**. Do the words bring to mind positive or negative feelings? What more specific emotions do the words suggest? Is there a pattern to the kinds of words the author uses? What does the author want to convey through those word choices? Make sure to comment on the effect in the margins.

C. Mark the text for **imagery**—words or phrases appealing to the senses—and write comments about the effect of the imagery in the margin. What does this image bring to mind? What emotions are stirred by the images?

D. Mark **comparisons**—similes, metaphors, personification—and briefly note the effect of the comparison. What is the similarity between the two objects being compared? What additional understanding is created through the comparison?

E. Note the **point of view**. How does the perspective from which the story or information is presented affect the reader's understanding? Write comments in the margin.

F.   Look for and note **repetition**. What is the author trying to emphasize through repeated ideas, images, or words and phrases?

G.   Look for **shifts**, changes in tone, point of view, verb tense—anything that changes the overall pattern. Note the changes and the effect of those changes.

Basic elements to annotate for in Literary Texts:

H.   Mark important **plot** events and/or **conflicts**, briefly noting the importance of each. What does the conflict reveal about character? Theme?

I.   Mark descriptive passages about the **characters**. Make brief notes about the relationships between the characters or personality traits of characters in the margins.

Basic elements to annotate for in Informational Texts:

J.   Mark the **organization** of the passage. How does the speaker organize his/her points? Most important first, last? Make notes in the margin.

K.   Mark **methods of exposition**—does the speaker use cause/effect, examples, facts, compare/contrast, etc. to make his/her point? Why is that method effective?

Advanced elements to annotate:

L.   Mark **sound devices**, such as **alliteration**, **rhyme**, or **onomatopoeia**. Comment on effect in the margins.

M.   Notice the **form/structure** of the text. Especially in poetry, the structure of the text itself may reveal a deeper meaning.

N.   Make a note of the types of **rhetorical appeals** created by the author's use of language. Make notes about why the appeals are effective for the intended audience.

O.   Mark other **literary techniques**, such as **allusion**, **paradox**, **irony**, **motif**, or **symbolism**. Be sure to connect the technique to an effect in your comments.

P.   Mark interesting or obvious patterns of **syntax**—the arrangement of words and grammatical elements—in the passage. Look for patterns of sentence lengths, variations of sentence types and patterns, active/passive voice, and punctuation that does not follow the standard rules of mechanics.