

Criteria for Successful Annotation

The above title like will take you to the source for this handout. Using your annotated copy of the book six weeks after your first reading, you can recall the key information in the book with reasonable thoroughness in a 15- to 30-minute review of your notes and the text. **Be certain to annotate any text you read in AP Language and Composition.**

Why Annotate?

- Annotate any text that you must know well, in detail, and from which you might need to produce evidence that supports your knowledge or reading, such as a book on which you will be tested.
- Don't assume that you must annotate when you read for pleasure; if you're relaxing with a book, well, relax. Still, some people—let's call them "not-abnormal"—actually annotate for pleasure.

Don't annotate other people's property, which is almost always selfish, often destructive, rude, and possibly illegal. For a book that doesn't belong to you, use adhesive notes for your comments, removing them before you return the text.

Don't annotate your own book if it has intrinsic value as an art object or a rarity. Consider doing what teachers do: **buy an inexpensive copy of the text for class.**

Tools: Highlighter, Pencil, and Your Own Text

1. Yellow Highlighter

A yellow highlighter allows you to mark exactly what you are interested in. Equally important, the yellow line emphasizes without interfering. Before highlighters, I drew lines under important spots in texts, but underlining is laborious and often distracting. Highlighters in blue and pink and fluorescent colors are even more distracting. The idea is to see the important text more clearly, not give your eyes a psychedelic exercise.

While you read, highlight whatever seems to be key information. At first, you will probably highlight too little or too much; with experience, you will choose more effectively which material to highlight.

(Choose the [link](#) to view highlighting on sample pages from *Walden*.)

2. Pencil

A pencil is better than a pen because you can make changes. Even geniuses make mistakes, temporary comments, and incomplete notes.

While you read, use marginalia—marginal notes—to mark key material. **Marginalia can include check marks, question marks, stars, arrows, brackets, and written words and phrases. Create your own system for marking what is important, interesting, quotable, questionable, and so forth.**

3. Your Text

Inside the front cover of your book, keep an orderly, legible list of "key information" with page references. Key information in a novel might include themes; passages that relate to the book's title; characters' names; salient quotes; important scenes, passages, and chapters; and maybe key definitions or vocabulary. Remember that key information will vary according to genre and the reader's purpose, so make your own good plan.

(Choose the [link](#) to view the inside cover of *Walden* with sample handwritten notes:)

As you read, section by section, chapter by chapter, **consider doing the following, if useful or necessary:**

- At the end of each chapter or section, **briefly** summarize the material.
- **Title each chapter or section** as soon as you finish it, especially if the text does not provide headings for chapters or sections. **Make a list of vocabulary words** on a back page or the inside back cover. Possible ideas for lists include the author's special jargon and new, unknown, or otherwise interesting words.