

Read. Write. Repeat.
Literacy Matters!
Close Reading and Annotating Text

“Close Reading” does not mean holding the book a quarter of an inch from your nose. When I ask you to CLOSE READ something, I want you to READ ACTIVELY and THINK about what you are reading. Don’t just let the rows of letters pass under your eyes while your mind goes off on vacation. FOCUS on what the text is saying and how it is saying it. As you know, this can be a challenge if the text is not the kind of thing you are used to reading or if it is not entertaining, but a truly literate person not only reads the words but understands them and sees how they apply to other ideas. Close reading helps you absorb ideas into your own mental framework. Some folks call it learning. And I want you to do it with a pencil in your hand!

When you close read, it is a good idea to annotate the text: write notes on it as you are reading. *Not random notes and doodles!* Annotating text not only helps you understand it and remember the important ideas, but ANNOTATIONS PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF CLOSE READING. A properly annotated text illustrates that you were reading in a focused and active way, making sense of the text and applying it to your own prior experience and knowledge. Here are some strategies for annotating a text:

- Write comments in the margins, using any blank space available.
- Make brief comments between or within lines of the text.
- Circle or put boxes, triangles, or clouds around words or phrases.
- Use abbreviations or symbols: brackets, stars, exclamation points, question marks, numbers, etc.
- Connect words, phrases, ideas, circles, boxes, etc., with lines or arrows.
- Underline/Highlight – CAUTION: Use this method sparingly. Underline/Highlight only a few words. Always combine these with another written commentary. Never underline/highlight an entire passage.
- Create your own code. (Include the “key” so I’ll know what you mean.)

So, what kinds of things should you mark? There are many possibilities:

- Have a conversation with the text. Talk back to it. Argue with it.
- Comment on things that surprise, intrigue, impress amuse, anger, puzzle, shock, disturb, repulse, and/or aggravate you.
- Comment on lines/quotations that you think are powerful or important.
- Express agreement or disagreement; include your evidence.
- Summarize key events.
- Paraphrase important passages.
- Make predictions.
- Connect ideas to each other or to other texts: What does it remind you of?
- Note anything you would like to discuss or do not understand.
- Note the writer’s tone; mark words or phrases that convey the tone.
- Ask questions of the text to illustrate your understanding (QAR): 1) Right There, 2) Think and Search, 3) Author and Me, 4) On My Own

The most common complaint about close reading is that it slows you down. That is the point! If annotating as you read annoys you, then read the entire text first and go back afterwards to annotate. Re-reading is an excellent comprehension strategy!