

Introducing English Studies
Chapter 3: Screencast Transcript

Slide 1 [Title slide]

Hello. I am Tonya Krouse, co-author of the textbook *Introducing English Studies*, and in this screencast, I will talk about “how to annotate for critical analysis.” While you might have been assigned notetaking exercises in the past, you may not understand the specific value certain kinds of annotation practices have for the study of literature. This screencast aims to explain just that.

Slide 2 [Text]

Topics in this presentation include:

1. Why practitioners of English Studies annotate
2. How annotation aids analysis
3. Annotations that work
4. Ineffective annotations
5. When to annotate
6. When you can't (or won't) write in the margins
7. Using annotations in the writing process

Slide 3 [Text]

So why DO people annotate? In fact, at some point in your life you might have been forbidden from writing in a book or told that doing so was wrong. But scholars of literature understand that annotation helps us to engage deeply and thoughtfully with our objects of study, and this conveys respect for them. There is also a difference between reading as intellectual work and reading as a pleasurable pastime. When we do the intellectual work of reading literature, we may want to return to a passage after we have had time to reflect, or we may want to use something that we have read as evidence for an interpretation. Annotations are invaluable for keeping track of those moments in what we've read. Still, you might strongly resist the impulse to write in the margins of a published work. If you do, you must discover another method for “writing” your way into your reading if you want to read like a professional.

Slide 4 [Image of an unannotated page]

Annotating actually helps literary scholars become better readers. It aids analysis by:

- Helping us to locate significant passages or to pinpoint progressions in plot and characterization.
- Providing a space for asking questions or making comments connected to our reading.
- Letting us highlight passages that are important to professors and classmates that we independently might not have noticed.

Slide 5 [Image of a page with effective annotations]

But not all annotations are created equal. Annotations that work:

- Help you find a line or passage that you want to discuss or write about.

- Offer insight into why something stood out to you or what it shows.
- Trace images, themes, ideas, or techniques that persist throughout the whole text.
- Create priorities for what to pay attention to when you return to a text.

Slide 6 [Image of a page with ineffective annotations]

In contrast, ineffective annotations

- Underline or highlight too much or too little.
- Offer no insight about why a phrase, passage, or sentence you underlined or highlighted is important.
- Provide no context connected to the larger narrative or plot.

Slide 7 [Text]

If you aren't sure when you should annotate, it can help to ask yourselves these questions:

- Is the text assigned for a course, or can I imagine working with it again in the future?
- Do I want to think about this text deeply and analytically?
- Do I want to converse with others about the text and be able to point to specific phrases, lines, or passages to support my claims?
- Do I want to write about this text?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is yes, then you should annotate!

Slide 8 [Text]

There are times, however, when you can't annotate in the physical book that you are reading or when you prefer not to do so. Sometimes annotating a book or article is not desirable because we do not own the book, we only have access to it in an electronic format, or we have another reason for wanting to keep the physical copy that we have pristine. Taking notes on paper can take longer than annotating in the margins, but it can be just as effective. As with marginal annotations, notes on paper are most effective when they include context, commentary, and questions. Be strategic in what you choose to write or type. Your goal is not to transcribe the entirety of the text with which you are working but to pinpoint areas that you want to dig into more deeply.

Slide 9 [Text]

Finally, annotations can be tremendously helpful in the writing process when we want to write about literary works. Annotation can help you to generate ideas, to structure your thinking, and to compile evidence to substantiate your interpretations.

- Use annotation for idea generation while you read. Trace the appearance of characters, symbols, motifs, or images, or use a system for recording questions or paper topics, such

as putting them in the upper right margin of pages so that you can access them at a glance.

- Review your annotations after reading to see if common ideas, themes, or questions emerge.
- Use your annotations after reading to identify important quotations to use as evidence in your writing.

Annotating lets you begin writing while you are reading, and it can take a lot of pressure off of the writing process. Try it and see!