

# Essay Skills: Annotation

**Tone:** Celebratory  
Admiration

**Form:** Heroic  
Broken down  
resembles  
sonnet

**Language:** technical  
Colloquial  
Conversational  
monosyllables  
Pen fat  
with what?

**Digging**  
Digging = extended metaphor of digging and roots.  
Heaney digs into his roots, his heritage

manual labor  
digging with  
the mind?

home  
power  
violence  
protection  
A natural extension?

Speaker: male  
patriarchal traditions  
reverent attitude

**Memory #1**  
his window -  
ownership  
threshold to  
his heritage

Under my window a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  
My father, digging. I look down - remembering / to look down on has negative con.  
but the poem is positive + celebratory

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away - connections with the past, former generations, traditions  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

In rhythm =  
in touch with  
in agreement  
with

rasping connotes a  
living thing

survival  
traditions

honesty  
potatoes

Symbol: peat  
living roots  
digging  
squat pen

Why squat?  
crouching  
ownership

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

in control, precise

skill, pride, dignity

-bragging rights

**Transition**  
Admiration  
colloquial  
language

By God, the old man could handle a spade,  
Just like his old man.

**Memory #2**  
My grandfather could cut more turf in a day  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it, then fell to right away  
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, digging down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

worked hard - work ethics  
Strength - technique

**Turning Point  
heritage**

The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awoken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

- negative images  
traditions / livelihoods destroyed  
No longer available

an awakening  
of what? Follow in what way?

**Closure - Acceptance**  
Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

- weapon - tool

Follows tradition of fathers  
using the tools available  
to him.

**Seamus Heaney**

Reminders of home  
+ hearth  
rests, snug,  
nestled

2 separate memories:  
Father digging potatoes  
Grandfather digging turf - peat bogs

The pen is mightier than the sword.

Chromatopoeia  
rasping  
gravelly  
squelch  
slap

# What is annotation?

Annotations are ideas or explanations that are attached to an original text in order to develop your understanding for a variety of purposes.

**Themes**  
 Abortion is wrong  
 - destroys potential (another Jesus?) (a gift from God)  
 - they were rich - had no reason apart from it was inconvenient

**Narrator - the unborn child**

**STRUCTURE - continuous monologue of 35 lines**

**UNTOUS...**

**Isaiah 9:6** "For unto us a child is born,"

**unfinished quotation**

**Made love or had sex?**

**Repetition for emphasis**

**Alliteration**

**Joy at being conceived**

**Safety Security (Metaphor)**

**Feels love already**

**Turning Point**

**no right to live, had to hope parents would**

**good reputation but does evil things**

**unable to fight back**

**Bitter at being aborted (betrayed)**

**no legal redress: A 'thing' not a 'human'**

**It removed an inconvenience**

**PURPOSE - to make reader sympathetic with narrator and therefore disagree with abortion**

**ORGANIZATION - 35 line continuous monologue**

**EMOTIVE TONE - 1-16 happy 17-35 angry and bitter**

**TECHNIQUES - metaphor repetition alliteration**

**INDIVIDUAL WORDS - I was, I was! Lived on trust 'Had no say' 'dropped'**

**CONTRAST - Joy of new life which is destroyed. Contrast is in narrator's feeling before/after turning point.**

**She had no more right to call herself a woman than a drag queen.**

**By the hand of one whose good name was graven on a brass plate in Wimpole Street, and dropped on the sterile floor of a new sprayed plastic waste bucket.**

**There was no Queens Counsel to take my brief. The cot I might have warmed when my passing was told. My father smiled. No grief filled my empty space. It which was celebrated with two tickets to see Dizzy La Rue like my mother was.**

**And love. Tho' I couldn't think each part of me was saying a silent, "Wait for me I will bring you love!"**

**My mother - my father. I had never seen my father. I had never seen my mother.**

**Soon they knew of me. Lusting to live. Tiny in shape. Small, but I was!**

**They committed themselves to me. Somewhere at sometime.**

**And so, I was!**

# Why annotate?

Main ideas:  
Understand the main ideas.

Summarise:  
Quickly pick out a variety of key information from the text.

You can annotate for various purposes.

Cause and effect:  
Understand the writer's inspiration and the effect of the text on the reader.

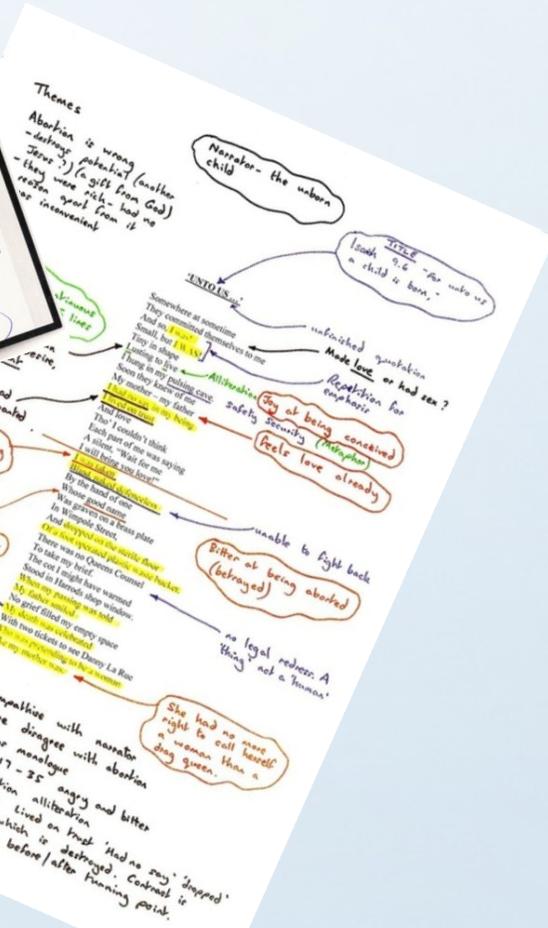
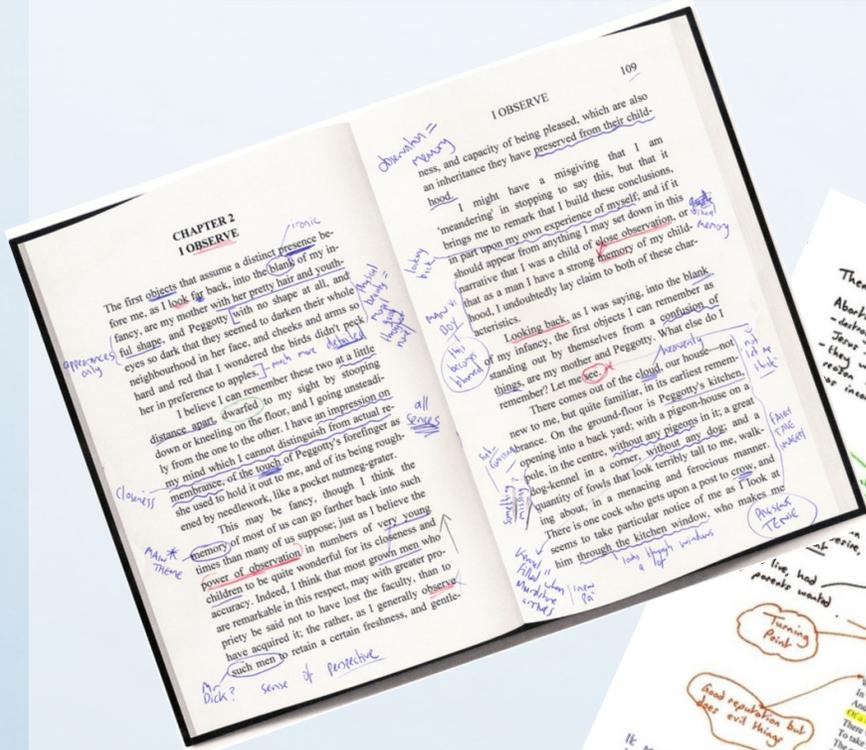
Make predictions/inferences:  
Use your analysis to make predictions about plot, character, themes, motifs or context.

Draw conclusions:  
Form an opinion or argument from your annotations and analyses.

Evaluate:  
Use your inferences, comparisons and conclusions to evaluate and make comments, based on evidence from your annotations.

Compare and contrast:  
Pick out detailed information that will assist you in organising ideas about multiple texts.

# How to: Annotate as you read



For **poems, articles and short stories**, read through the text once to form some initial opinions and ideas. Annotate on your second reading. For **novels**, annotate as you read, marking important passages to come back to.

## Mark in the text:

- Characters (who)
- When (setting)
- Where (setting)
- Vocabulary
- Important information

## Write in the margins:

- Summarise
- Make predictions
- Formulate opinions
- Make connections
- Ask questions
- Analyse the author's craft
- Write reflections/reactions/comments
- Look for patterns/repetitions

Next: What should I look for?

Use different colours or boxes for different topics

# WORD LEVEL

Word-level annotation concerns analysis of individual words and their relationships with other words within the text.

## Key question

**Example:** “Call me Ishmael.” (*Moby Dick*, Herman Melville)

Which words are important to you as a reader?

“Ishmael” – Gives us information about what could be a key character in the text.  
You may also consider: word classes and/or semantic fields.

What are the connotations/denotations of this word?

**Denotations:** Ishmael is a figure in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an and was Abraham's first son according to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In Hebrew, the name means ‘He will hear God.’  
**Connotations:** Will the character have some **religious** beliefs or connections? Is the writer trying to portray a moral message or teaching that is similar to those in religious texts? Does the Hebrew name suggest Eastern connections or ancestry?

Why has the writer chosen to use this word?

The name connotes ideas of religion and someone or something ‘exotic’ to Western readers.

How does this word impact the reader?

The reader is intrigued to know more about the character given the connotations of his name. How might this provide clues to the rest of the novel? What is this word contributing to your understanding of the text?

# SENTENCE LEVEL

Sentence-level annotation will require you to analyse structure and content of sentences and clauses.

## Key question

**Example:** “Call me Ishmael.” (*Moby Dick*, Herman Melville)

Why is this sentence important to you as a reader?

“Call me Ishmael.” – The first sentence in Melville’s famous novel *Moby Dick*. The use of a simple sentence suggests an informal or abrupt tone. The use of first person pronoun ‘me’ informs the reader that the writer is employing direct address to present the character as a narrator. The omission of quotation marks enhances the notion that the reader is being addressed by the character.

What are the connotations/denotations of this sentence?

**Denotations:** The narrator is named ‘Ishmael’ and the text is currently being narrated from this character’s perspective.  
**Connotations:** If the character uses the phrase “call me Ishmael” it is suggested that perhaps he has another name which is not preferable. This may suggest that the narrator is unreliable.

Why has the writer chosen to use this sentence?

In three words the writer has given opportunities for the reader to infer: the setting of the text; the history of the character and the personality of the character whilst setting up the relationship between narrator/character and reader.

How does this sentence impact the reader?

What is the impact of [first person narrative](#)? What does this sentence suggest about the character? How reliable is this narrator?

# TEXT LEVEL

Text-level annotation will require you to analyse structure and content of sentences and clauses.

Key question	Example: “Call me Ishmael.” ( <i>Moby Dick</i> , Herman Melville)
Context	<p>Historical context – Refers to moods, attitudes, issues, events, conditions of the era of when the text is set/written</p> <p>Social/cultural context – Refers to social movements, religious ideas, political and economic events</p> <p>Writer’s attitudes and values – Why do you think the author chose to write the novel? Were they responding to, or commenting on social/historical/personal events? What is the message of the text? What are the writer’s opinions?</p>
Themes/motifs	<p>A <b>theme</b> is an idea or point that is central to a narrative, which can often be summed in a single word (e.g. love, death, betrayal).</p> <p>A <b>motif</b> is a recurring idea in a narrative that contributes to some symbolic meaning (e.g. references to blood in Shakespeare’s <i>Macbeth</i>).</p>
Narrative style	<p>Think about your word and sentence level analyses. How do they contribute to a particular tone? Does the text have multiple narrators/narrative styles? What is the impact of this? Why do you think the writer chose to reflect characters and events in this way?</p>
Genre	<p>Genre is the literary tradition to which the text belongs (e.g. science-fiction, romance, horror).</p>

