

Writing in the Margins: Six Comprehension Strategies

This table, adapted from *Critical Reading: Deep Reading Strategies for Expository Texts Teacher Guide*, provides six strategies that help readers understand texts. While making connections, clarifying information or doing other work defined on this page, write down your thoughts in the margins of the text, on sticky notes or in your Cornell notes.

Visualize

Visualize what the author is saying and draw an illustration in the margin. Visualizing what authors say will help you clarify complex concepts and ideas.

When visualizing, ask:

- What does this look like?
- How can I draw this concept/idea?
- What visual and/or symbol best represents this idea?

Clarify

Clarify complex ideas presented in the text. Readers clarify ideas through a process of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Pausing to clarify ideas will increase your understanding of the ideas in the text.

To clarify information, ask:

- What terms are important here and what do they mean?
- What do I need to reread to make sure I understand?
- What are the important ideas here and how do I know they are important?
- What can I paraphrase or summarize to see if I understand what the author is saying?
- What examples of figurative language do I need to figure out?

Respond

Respond to ideas in the text as you read. Your responses can be personal or analytical in nature. Thoughtful responses will increase engagement and comprehension.

When responding, ask:

- What is interesting to me and why?
- How is the author using language or images in interesting ways?
- How do I feel about the ideas here? (link to emotions)
- What do I agree or disagree with?
- What is the author trying to convince me of?
- What facts, data and other evidence is the author using and do they persuade me?

Summarize

Briefly summarize paragraphs or sections of a text in the margin. Summarizing is a good way to keep track of essential information while gaining control of lengthier passages.

When summarizing, ask:

- What is this paragraph/section about?
- What is the author *doing* in this paragraph/section?
- What key terms and/or ideas should be included?

Connect

Make connections within the reading to your own life and to the world. Making connections will improve your comprehension of the text.

To make connections, ask:

- How does this relate to me?
- What does this remind me of?
- What does this make me think about?
- How does this idea relate to other ideas in the text, and to other texts?
- How does this relate to the world?

Question

Question both the ideas in the text and your own understanding of the text. Asking good questions while reading will help you become a more critical reader.

To question, ask:

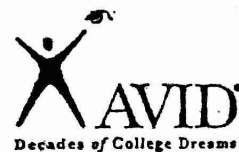
- What am I confused about?
- How would I explain the important ideas?
- Do I understand what the author is saying?
- Do I understand what the author is doing?
- What questions would I like to ask the author?
- What does this make me question about my life or world?
- What questions do I have about how the author wrote this piece (writing strategies; style)?



Writing in the Margins: Six Points of Literary Analysis

This table provides six ways of looking closely at texts to do literary analysis; these are ways to consider how an author crafts a text. Your teacher may assign a particular point to look for or you may determine a focus yourself. As you read, mark the text according to your focus and then use the questions at the bottom of the page to help guide what you write in the margins. Write down your responses in the margins of your text, on sticky notes or in your Cornell notes.

<p>Elements of Language</p> <p>In order to understand and interpret elements of language used in a text, identify and mark examples of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parts of speech • unusual, purposeful or repetitive diction (word choice) • use of phrases • use of clauses • patterns of sentencings (e.g., simple, compound, loose, periodic) • approach to syntax (how sentences are constructed; e.g., use of conjunctions, parallelism, etc.) 	<p>Figurative Language</p> <p>In order to understand and interpret the use of figurative language in a text, identify and mark examples of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • metaphor • oxymoron • paradox • personification • pun • idiom • simile • hyperbole
<p>Literary Elements</p> <p>In order to understand and interpret literary elements in a text, identify and mark examples of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • characters (protagonist, antagonist, foil) • setting • plot • point of view • theme • tone • rhetorical shift 	<p>Literary Techniques</p> <p>In order to understand and interpret literary techniques in a text, identify and mark examples of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allusion • characterization • dialogue • irony • satire • persuasive appeals (ethos, logos, pathos) • motif • symbolism • imagery



Writing in the Margins: Six Points of Literary Analysis.

(cont.)

Sound Devices

In order to understand and interpret sound devices in a text, **identify and mark** examples of:

- alliteration
- assonance
- consonance
- meter
- onomatopoeia
- rhyme
- rhythm

Overall Voice and Style Analysis

In order to understand and interpret voice and to analyze the overall style of a text, **identify and mark** examples of:

- active/passive voice
- detail
- diction (word choice)
- imagery
- syntax
- structure
- tone shift

Based on what you marked in the text, address these types of questions in your margin notes:

Level 2:

- What language patterns do I see?
- How does the language (or figurative language) change over the course of the text or with different characters/narrators?
- What do I notice about the author's use of figurative language? Are there patterns?
- What are the details of a particular literary element—setting, for example? What makes up the setting (or who are the characters, what are the conflicts in the plot, etc.)?
- What do I notice about the author's use of allusion (or dialogue, motif, persuasive appeals, etc.)?
- What do I notice about the author's use of alliteration (or assonance, rhyme, etc.)?
- What stands out as important about the author's style? Is the Imagery important (or the detail, syntax, etc.)?

Level 3:

- What is the author's purpose using language (or figurative language, sound, literary techniques, etc.) in this way—what effect does s/he achieve?
- How does this example impact the overall meaning of the text?
- How does the author's use of specific literary techniques help develop or support a theme or claim in the text?

