

# Why Annotations are Actually the Best

by Lydia Vodopic  
September  
15, 2025

Never in my life did I ever think that I would annotate something out of my own free will.

Ever since I could remember, annotations have been my least favorite part of every English class. I would deal with this annoyance by highlighting random passages, making senseless scribbles with an arrow, or just not doing them at all. I had no idea what I was supposed to write: the important things? I feel like every part of a book is important. If there was an unimportant part, why would the author bother to write it? Some teachers suggest you organize your annotations by theme, which I guess is a bit better, but I always felt so stupid underlining “the girl prayed” and writing in all caps next to it “RELIGION”. Like, good job Lydia, you just pointed out something that absolutely did not need to be pointed out.

And don’t even get me started on required annotations. “At least 2 per page” is what most of my teachers would assign. Now what is that about? What if one page has nothing of interest whatsoever, but the next has 15 things I want to write about? At the end of the day I would have the same number of annotations, just less spaced out and more about the things I found interesting. That response was not found to be acceptable. As with most writing related things, the second you are told you *have* to do something – that it’s *required* for a grade – is the second when all motivation to do it has left you. I would get especially annoyed when the value of your annotations were graded. I hated it when teachers said that my annotations weren’t up to par, or not “insightful” enough. If my annotations are truly just my genuine thoughts on the text, are my thoughts not up to par? Is my brain lacking?

Maybe my aversion to annotations started because I just don’t like people telling me what to do; an inner tendency to rebel against authority. Or maybe I was just lazy and liked to procrastinate. Or maybe it was because deep down, I really *didn’t* know what to say. But all of that changed this summer...

I was reading a book in my room on a late July afternoon, a time of year when school work is farthest from my mind, and any sense of academics are long gone. It was something I had done a hundred times before, but this time, as I reached the end of the chapter, I came across a sentence so groundbreaking, so baffling, a sentence that slapped so hard, that I was compelled by some greater force to set the book down, run and grab a pen, and underline it.

I was in a state of confusion and shock: *Did I just annotate something? Because I wanted to?* I had never experienced anything like this before. It's like something clicked in my brain and suddenly years upon years of my teachers telling me the value of close reading and text analyzing all made sense to me. This was *amazing*. How could I have been so stupid to ignore the most wonderful act of annotating for my whole life? When I moved on to another book, I highlighted *multiple* things! Lydia two years ago would look at me and laugh!

This school year, I have been annotating every text I get, academic or not, with a fervor I have never had before. It's not even that I now understand the importance of annotating, and so I'll force myself to write in the margins of a poem (although I do get why they matter now). It's the fact that I feel an unbridled joy every time I highlight, circle, or lengthily write my thoughts on a line. I look *forward* to annotating. I get *sad* if I can't annotate something. My younger self would read this and think I'm crazy but I'm not! I just realized the beauty of something that has been in front of me, something that I have actively disliked, this whole time.

How is one supposed to even scratch the surface of the meaning and implications of a text without annotations? They force you to be present and make you think about, and *connect* to, the text in a way that is impossible to do in any other fashion. Sure, it's one thing to read a passage and get an idea of what the author was trying to say, but it's another thing entirely to become an active participant in the reading process. To make the text your own in a way that does not override the author's purpose, but to say "I understand what you are saying at a level that is meaningful and beautiful. What you are saying is important and makes me think about the world in a way I thought I never would." And that's why annotations are amazing.

Now, some of you may be reading this and thinking “Yeah right! What a load! Annotations are stupid.” And to that I would say, I understand. I was in the same mindset as you were not too long ago. Just because you dislike annotations doesn’t mean that you hate reading and writing. In fact, you probably love reading and think that annotations just get in the way of it. But until you have tried it, and I mean really attempted to annotate, not because your teacher told you to but because you *wanted* to, don’t underestimate the power of underlining a spectacular sentence.

I think the moral of my journey through annotations is that you should never be afraid to grow. Sure, right now you may vehemently hate or love something, but in a few years you may feel the opposite, and there is no shame in admitting you were wrong. Yes, in 7th grade I went on rant after rant about how annotations were the worst, but now I will endlessly rave about how annotations are actually the best. And while there are definitely flaws in some English curriculums, most of your teachers are probably onto something, so even if you don’t agree with their methods of writing or reading right now, maybe keep some of that information in your back pocket for your future self. Who knows? You might do a complete 180 like I did, and discover what you were searching for was right there all along.

I love you, annotations. Keep being awesome.

P.S. If you were wondering what the sentence was that skyrocketed me into my annotation obsession, it was “But when the strong were too weak to hurt the weak, the weak had to be strong enough to leave” – The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Milan Kundera. Isn’t that such a great sentence? Like a breath of fresh air and a slap in the face all at the same time!

*Thanks for reading this blog! Come back next Monday for a new edition!*

-----  
-----

*Do you write poetry? Ben is looking to interview Lane Tech poets about their work and their process for an October blog post. Reach out [here](#) if you'd be interested; this link closes on September 19th.*