

# Active Reading

*Why Good Readers Make Better Writers.*

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## Don't Read Homework Like You Read a Magazine.

Reading for pleasure is often done *passively*, without the need to organize the elements of a writer's work or, more importantly, your *responses* to those elements.

For college writing, it is your interpretation of literary works that drive your essays.

**Passive Reading:** reading done without an active, critical mindset.

**Active Reading:** using techniques to more fully engage with a text.

## Keep Your Focus on the *Meaning*

What a writer *means* or *intends to mean* in a work can be interpreted different ways by different people, so *meaning* is important because it can be the bridge to a work's *theme*.

When it comes time to write your essays about literature, it's *your own interpretation of the theme* that's important.

- **General Topic:** the general subject of a work (*objective, just the facts—what is the story about?*).
- **Theme:** the key concept of the work, your *interpretation (what does the story mean?)*.

## The Benefits of Annotating:

The best way to read actively is to *annotate*. *Annotating* is simply writing notes in the margins of a literary work as you read.

- Annotating will help you interpret the *theme* more efficiently.
- Annotations help identify key elements to consider as support for your interpretation.
- Annotating will save you time since you have to read a work fewer times to access its theme and locate support for your claims.

# Here is what annotating looks like:

"He is in Melbourne now." — image of someone who has escaped

Go

she works here? slave labor?

She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question. In her home anyway she had shelter and food; she had those whom she had known all her life about her. Of course she had to work hard, both in the house and at business. What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? Say she was a fool, perhaps; and her place would be filled up by advertisement. Miss Gavan would be glad. She had always had an edge on her, especially whenever there were people listening.

Stay

1 - shelter  
2 - friend

"Miss Hill, don't you see these ladies are waiting?"

learn horrible working conditions

"Look lively, Miss Hill, please."

- she has a better job

She would not cry many tears at leaving the Stores.

issue of mother's life  
would she fall into same trap as her mother???

married change in life respect mother's VIOLENCE

But in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married -- she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been. Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence. She knew it was that that had given her the palpitations. When they were growing up he had never gone for her like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl but latterly he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother's sake. And now she had nobody to protect her. Ernest was dead and Harry, who was in the church decorating business, was nearly always down somewhere in the country. Besides, the invariable squabble for money on Saturday nights had begun to weary her unspeakably.

Father's violence? Did he beat her mother? intimidate?

he beat brothers threaten her

She always gave her entire wages -- seven shillings -- and Harry always sent up what he could but the trouble was to get any money from her father. He said she used to squander the money, that she had no head, that he wasn't going to give her his hard-earned money to throw about the streets, and much more, for he was usually fairly bad on Saturday night.

money - she gives all her wages economic slavery

Father poor image of daughter money

In the end he would give her the money and ask her had she any intention of buying Sunday's dinner. Then she had to rush out as quickly as she could and do her marketing, holding her black leather purse tightly in her hand as she elbowed her way through the crowds and returning home late under her load of provisions. She had hard work to keep the house together and to see that the two young children who had been left to her charge went to school regularly and got their meals regularly. It was hard work -- a hard life -- but now that she was about to leave it she did not find it a wholly undesirable life.

DRUNK housework childcare - children depend on her

she is burdened w housework

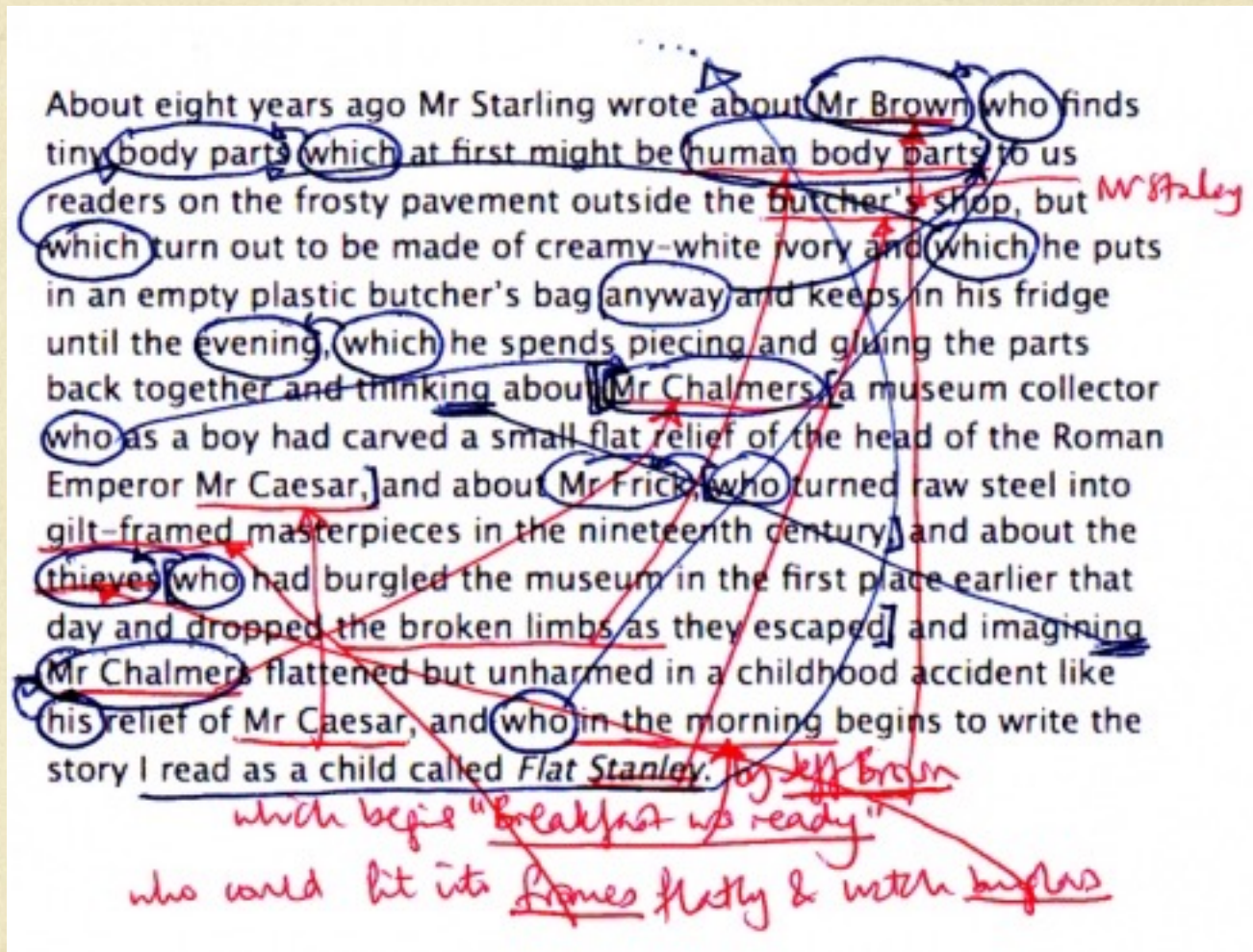
She was about to explore another life with Frank. Frank was very kind, manly, open-hearted. She was to go away with him by the night-boat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Ayres where he had a home waiting for her. How well she remembered the first time she had seen him; he was lodging in a house on the main road where she used to visit. It seemed a few weeks ago. He was standing at the gate, his peaked cap pushed back on his head and his hair tumbled forward over a face of bronze. Then they had come to know each other. He used to meet her outside the Stores every evening and see her home. He took her

Frank kind - diff. from father

Who are these children? How did she become responsible for them?

She hasn't known him long. How well does she really know him?

There is, though, such a thing as bad annotating:



<http://homologue.wordpress.com/2008/11/02/flat-stanley-and-utensils/>

Try not to overdo it and further confuse yourself.

## Helpful Hints for Annotating:

There are key points to look out for in a passage. These 3 *key elements to comprehension* are:

1. **the topic** (brief, simple summary—what is the subject of the work?)
2. **your interpretation** (what is the *theme* of the work—what does the work *mean*?)
3. **supporting details** (evidence from the work, scenes, characters, dialogue, symbols, etc. )

If you've annotated well, you can simply go back and read your notes to help gather your thoughts on the work's theme and start formulating *support for your claim*.

## Strategies for Active Reading:

1. Always read with a pen or pencil in hand!
2. Use that pencil to annotate.
3. Listen to what you're reading.
4. Identify important elements and respond with ideas for why they are important.
5. Question elements of the piece - what they *mean*, how they contribute to *theme*.
6. Look up words you don't know immediately.



## The Four Stages of Active Reading:

1. **prep** (*access prior knowledge – read any questions you will answer*)
2. **read** (*annotate*)
3. **re-read** (*annotate*)
4. **review** (*further develop your own responses from your notes*)

**Yes, read it twice.**

**At least.**

Just like listening to music or watching a movie, the more often you hear or see it, the more of the fine points you absorb.

Think about listening to a song. Do you really hear and understand all the lyrics the first time you listen to it?

The same goes for reading. You miss a lot the first time you read something, so reading again always helps clarify the work's *theme*.

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