**Annotation Guide**

Reading is often misinterpreted as a passive activity. Annotating will force you to actively use your brain. This is a good thing. What follows are some suggestions that will help with annotating.

1. **Plan on reading passages, if not everything, TWICE**.

The first time, read for overall meaning and impressions. The second time, read more carefully. Mark ideas, new vocabulary, etc. Keep in mind, at this stage you have not yet actually started annotating.

2. **Before you can analyze, you must COMPREHEND. THIS DOES NOT COUNT AS ANALYSIS but may help your understanding. YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE CREDIT FOR THESE TYPES OF COMMENTS ON YOUR ANNOTATIONS.**

a. Summarize important ideas in your own words.

b. Add examples from real life, other books, TV, movies, and so forth.

c. Define words that are new to you.

d. Mark passages that you find confusing with a ???

e. Comment on things that intrigue, impress, surprise, disturb, etc.

f. Feel free to draw picture when a visual connection is appropriate

3. Begin annotating by marking specific elements or features of the text and then explaining **WHY** and **HOW** those things are significant.

a. Word choice: How does the writer’s choice in words support or contrast the plot within the text? Are the word choices very formal and sophisticated or are they simple? Could these words have multiple meanings or connotations?

b. Figurative language: Why are the examples of figurative language included in the first place? How do they contribute to the larger meaning of the text? Is there a pattern linking the figurative examples within the text? Do not simply write “simile.” Explain what it means and **why** it’s important.

c. Historical/social context: What do certain actions/statements indicate about society (both modern and the period when the text was written)? What does the text say about human nature?

d. Weirdness: If something strikes you as strange, it probably is. Try to figure out why that strange thing occurred, and what it means.

e. Obvious: You are familiar with many common elements of analysis thanks to T.V. and movies. What does a cloudy sky indicate? The color red, or pink, or black? Position (why do castles typically appear on a hill; why do people kneel)?

**N.B. DO NOT WRITE NON-SENSE. AVOID “IMAGERY,” “THE READER,” AND “FEELINGS” AT ALL COSTS.** If you write that imagery “helps the reader imagine” or “paints a clear picture,” “makes the author’s meaning clear,” or “creates a feeling of anger/sadness/pity for the reader,” that means **nothing. Feelings ≠ Analysis.** Do not do that. You have been warned.

**Literary Term Definitions** (some of these are new, but many you are expected to already know):

*Point of View* (first, second, limited omniscient, omniscient)– the perspective from which a narrative is conveyed

e.g. In Gotye’s break-up anthem, “Somebody that I Used to Know,” he uses second person point of view to give the impression that his lamentations about abandonment, betrayal, and heartbreak are universal. “You” could be anyone, and choosing this point of view allows the listener to project the identity of the “heartbreaker” onto whomever he/she chooses. However, there is a deeper level of complexity during the second verse, when the speaker suddenly switches from the male to female perspective. As the female speaker tells her side of the relationship, she uses “you” to achieve that same level of relatability.

*Syntax* – the grammar, or arrangement and order of words, within a sentence or paragraph.

e.g. Ariana Grande’s grammatically questionable line in “Break Free,” “Now that I’ve become who I really are,” not only rhymes with the previous line, “Never by the hands of a broken heart,” but has helped her break free of grammatical rules and the conventions of language. She’s grown to appreciate the humor of the song: "I need to shake it off and let it go and be a little less rigid and old," Grande told Time. "I'm like, 90. I need to not be that old." It also paradoxically shows that she has not broken free of the convention of rhyme, or her producer’s influence (as he insisted on the line).

*Diction* – the selection of words and vocabulary in a literary work. Diction can be very formal and sophisticated or simple, and changes the tone of the text.

e.g. Jay Z’s song about racial profiling, “99 Problems,” speaks to public perceptions of rappers who are “Tryna play the boy like he’s saccharine.” Formal diction like “saccharine” is used to prove that Jay Z breaks rap stereotypes as an educated man who is far from sweet, as the word implies. In fact, “saccharine” means too sweet, in a way that doesn’t seem genuine, alluding to Jay Z’s greater depth as an artist.

*Allusion* – a reference to a mythological, literary, or historical person, place, or thing.

e.g., “Pompeii” by Bastille, alludes to the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D., setting up the scene of natural disaster, but also speaks to man’s desire to be ignorant (based on the events surrounding the original eruption).

*Denotation* – the explicit meaning of a word (the dictionary definition).

e.g. Sia’s desire to “swing from the chandelier” in her song, “Chandelier,” seems like a dangerous venture. According to Dictionary.com, a chandelier is a “decorative hanging light with branches for several light bulbs or candles.” Chandeliers could be hot from either fire or electricity. They are also mounted on ceilings, so swinging from one would be physically dangerous due to the risk of falling.

*Connotation* – emotional or cultural associations surrounding words or phrases (not the dictionary definition).

e.g. Sia’s desire to “swing from the chandelier” in her song, “Chandelier,” is a declaration of her need for freedom. Chandeliers are household decorations providing light, but they are also associated of opulence and decadence, as they can be quite expensive, sometimes being made of crystals or diamonds. The idea of excess related to chandeliers implies the moral decay of materialistic modern society. Therefore, since “swinging from the chandelier” is not something commonly done in polite society, Sia is asserting her desire to abandon traditional behavioral conventions in place of fun, freedom, and excitement.

*Euphemism* – nice words used to express something unpleasant.

e.g. In “Roar,” Katy Perry insists that she is “scared to rock the boat and make a mess / So [she] sat quietly, agreed politely.” “Rock the boat” is a euphemism for breaking the status quo or challenging tradition. Sitting “quietly” and being “polite” represent Perry’s acceptance of the way things are at that point in the song.

*Pun* – a play on words for comedic effect.

e.g. In “Fancy,” Iggy Azalea refers to herself as a “Hot girl, hands off, don’t touch that,” referring to the double meaning of “hot” while establishing herself as someone capable of wordplay that puts her far out of your league.

*Ambiguity –* a phrase, statement, or situation that can be interpreted in two or more ways. These multiple meanings and confusion, often deliberate, leave the intended significance uncertain.

e.g. In “Lego House,” Ed Sheeran says “My three words have two meanings/There’s one thing on my mind/it’s all for you,” not only creating word-play with three-two-one-four/for, but also leaving the listener questioning which version of I love you he means, and what his motivations in the relationship are depending on which meaning he intends.

*Epiphany –* a moment of insight or revelation by which a character’s life is greatly altered, a realization or sudden understanding.

e.g. In David Guetta’s anthem, “Titanium,” Sia asserts herself as “bulletproof.” Even though the “you” she addresses in the song “shouts” and “criticizes” her, she realizes that all of the “bullets ricochet.” Her resilience, even when “in the line of fire,” is a fundamental part of who she is.

*Myth –* a narrative that attempts to explain human motivations and the nature of the world, usually through supernatural terms; they explain rituals, traditions, or are based on popular stories.

e.g. “Icarus” by Bastille alludes to the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus. “Icarus is flying too close to the sun/And Icarus's life, it has only just begun,” illustrating the faults of those who believe themselves invincible and “fly[] too close to the sun” literally and metaphorically. Alluding to this myth shows that man has learned nothing through the ages.

*Mood –* the atmosphere or predominant emotion in a literary work.

e.g. “Timber” by Pitbull begins with a country beat, which he plays up with the line “swing your partner round and round,” referring to the Dosey Do, creating a sense of comfort and security, as opposed to a more threatening traditional bass beat.

*Tone* – the writer’s or speaker’s attitude toward a subject, character, or audience; it is conveyed

through the author’s choice of words (diction) and details. Tone can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, bitter, etc.

e.g., In Magic!’s “Rude,” the male speaker is trying to gain the approval of his girlfriend’s father in order to obtain his permission to marry her. In the beginning, the speaker “jumped out of bed” and “put on [his] new suit,” which indicates excitement and hopefulness However, this positive tone is quickly reversed when the father tells him, “tough luck my friend, but the answer is no.” The speaker transitions to a state of confusion asking, “Why you gotta be so rude? Don’t you know I’m human too?” and then he decides to disregard the father’s opinion by resolving to “Marry that girl. Marry her anyway.” By the end of the song, his tone is defiant.

*Alliteration* – the practice of beginning several consecutive or neighboring words with the same

sound.

e.g. Florence and the Machine’s “Dog Days are Over” is alliterative in title and throughout the song. Florence sings, “Leave all your love and your longing behind,” which makes an audible connection between “leave,” “love,” and “longing,” which she believes are inexorably intertwined.

*Irony* – the opposite of what you would expect (can be verbal or situational).

e.g. Ironically, Alanis Morissette’s “Ironic,” isn’t ironic. “[R]ain on your wedding day” when it was specifically forecast not to rain is irony, “rain on your wedding day” just sucks. This illustrates the importance of paying attention in English class.

*Symbol* – any object, person, place, or action that has both a meaning in itself and that stands for

something larger than itself, such as a quality, attitude, belief, or value.

e.g. In Rihanna’s “Umbrella,” she promises her love interest a safe, committed relationship. She promises, “You can stand under my umbrella,” which is a literal desire to protect her significant other from the rain, but rain also symbolizes tough times. The relationship, and their commitment to one another, is the ultimate protection from pain and “pouring rain.”

*Hyperbole* – a deliberate, extravagant, and often outrageous exaggeration; it may be used for either serious or comic effect.

e.g. In “Just the Way You Are,” Bruno Mars uses a series of hyperbolic cliches in order to prove to his love interest that his love for her is endless based on her physical appearance. He insists that “her eyes make the stars look like they’re not shining,” which realistically overstates the brightness of her eyes. Since stars are stereotypically associated with beauty, human wonder, and fate, this comparison establishes her as more beautiful and radiant than gaseous balls of energy in outer space. Sorry Bruno, but unless she has alien eyeballs, this is not possible.

*Theme* – the central message of a literary work. It is expressed as a sentence or general statement

about life or human nature. A literary work can have more than one theme, and most themes are not directly stated but implied.

e.g. Youth and inexperience are central themes of Avicii’s “Wake Me Up.” The speaker is initially lost, either metaphorically or physically, but he is “Feeling [his] way through the darkness / Guided by a beating heart,” so he is attempting to follow his instincts in order to gain his bearings. He laments, “They tell me I’m too young to understand,” but he is wise enough to know that if he doesn’t “open up [his] eyes” that he will one day be old and have regrets. The speaker is taking charge of his own life in spite of his inexperience and the judgment he receives. His youth, and the ignorance associated with it, gives him courage, proven by his declaration, “I wish I could stay forever this young / Not afraid to close my eyes.”

*Imagery* – the words or phrases a writer uses that appeal to the senses.

e.g. Right from the beginning of “Red” Taylor Swift uses emotional associations with color to describe her feelings after a failed relationship. She sings, “Like the colors in autumn, so bright just before they lose it all,” which equates the bright colors with the intensity of the final throes of the relationship right before it ended in the same way that fall precedes winter.

*Metaphor* – a comparison of two unlike things not using “like” or “as.”

e.g. Ed Sheeran’s “Lego House” uses the metaphor of Legos to describe the end of a relationship. Sheeran sees both as something that “takes so long to build… and it can break apart in an instant.” The metaphor of Legos creates something fragile but not irreparable, because “If things go wrong we can knock it down.”

*Personification* – a kind of metaphor that gives inanimate objects or abstract ideas human

characteristics.

e.g. Mumford and Sons’ “Winter Winds” revolves around the speaker’s conflicted feelings about a back-and-forth relationship. This struggle is personified by an internal conversation, where he admits, “my head told my heart / ‘Let love grow’ / But my heart told my head / ‘This time no,’” as he feels so conflicted that a single body could not contain such contradictory emotions.

*Simile* – a comparison of two different things or ideas using words such as “like” or “as.”

e.g. In “Speak Now,” Taylor Swift uses a series of similes to contrast the stereotypes that people generally associate with weddings. She notes, “And the organ starts to play / A song that sounds like a death march,” which takes an event that usually marks the beginning of a relationship and precedes new life (i.e. children) and associates it with death. The use of the term “death march,” while dramatic, also implies that this union is forced, at least on some level. Whether this marriage is a result of feelings of obligation or duty, this simile makes the couple’s resistance clear.