

Annotating a Work of Fiction

- 0:00 **Owl:** Welcome to Annotating a Work of Fiction, an instructional video on reading comprehension brought to you by the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab.
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- 0:15 Reading a work of fiction, such as a short story, play, or novel, can be easier if you know what to look for and annotate while you read.
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- 0:24 When reading a work of fiction, you should look for several key elements.
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- 0:29 First, make a note of the major characters.
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- 0:32 Many times there is a main character, or protagonist, who is the focus of the story.
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- 0:39 The protagonist may be a hero or anti-hero, someone who is flawed but still fulfills the role of the hero.
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- 0:47 There may also be an antagonist, someone who is opposed to the main character.
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- 0:53 Every story has a setting, a place and time where the story unfolds.
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- 0:59 The setting may be historical or invented.
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- 1:03 Every story also has a plot.
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- 1:06 The plot is the action that unfolds throughout the story.
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- 1:09 Traditionally, a story plot centers around a conflict and a resolution.
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- 1:15 A common plot formula has five stages.
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- 1:18 It begins with an exposition that introduces the characters, setting, and events leading up to the story.
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- 1:25 It then goes through a series of events known as the rising action during which conflict escalates.
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- 1:33 This leads to a climax that marks a turning point for the main character or characters.
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- 1:38 Afterwards comes the period of falling action during which conflicts are resolved.
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- 1:45 Finally, the plot ends with a resolution that concludes the story.
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- 1:51 As stories, works of fiction have a narrator who tells the story from a particular point of view.
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- 1:57 There are different types of point of view.
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- 2:00 For instance, a story with first-person point of view is told by a particular character and uses the pronoun “I” or “we” to tell the story.
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- 2:10 A story with second-person point of view features the reader as the main character and uses the pronoun “you.”
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- 2:16 While less common, this point of view is featured in choose-your-own-adventure books.

2:22	Finally, a story with third-person point of view is told by a character or entity who has privileged knowledge of the main character; this narrator uses the pronouns “he,” “she,” or “they” to tell the story.
2:37	The third-person narrator is sometimes called the omniscient narrator because of its privileged knowledge of events and characters’ thoughts.
2:47	Every narrator also has a particular tone.
2:50	For instance, Jonathan Swift’s <i>Gulliver’s Travels</i> is told by a narrator with a humorous and satirical tone.
2:58	On the other hand, the narrator in George Orwell’s <i>1984</i> has a serious and even tragic tone.
3:05	The narrator’s tone helps establish the feeling and meaning of the story.
3:10	Finally, every story has one or more themes that it develops.
3:15	A theme is a major idea expressed by a story.
3:19	For instance, the <i>Myth of Sisyphus</i> conveys the theme that human endeavor is ultimately futile, whereas Takikiji Kobayashi’s “The Cannery Boat” emphasizes the theme of working-class unity leading to successful resistance to oppression.
3:36	Look for these elements as you read and identify them with a highlight, underline, or margin note.
3:43	Let’s try this with the short story “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin.
3:49	Write the main characters in the margin:
3:52	Louise Mallard
3:53	Brently Mallard, husband
3:56	Josephine, sister
3:59	Richards, friend of Brently
4:02	Describe the setting:
4:04	Late nineteenth century at the Mallard residence
4:08	Define the point of view:
4:09	Third-person omniscient
4:12	...And the tone:
4:13	Ironic (characters misinterpret Louise’s behavior)
4:18	Finally, list the key themes:
4:21	freedom,
4:22	selfhood,
4:23	self-fulfillment,
4:25	and the meaning of love
4:29	A good way to keep track of the major elements of a story is to construct a story map either during or after you read.



- 4:36 A story map will help you identify the major elements of a story and remember them for later, say when it comes time to write about the story or take a quiz.
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- 4:45 [Click here to watch a video about how to make a story map.](#)
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- 4:50 Following these simple steps will help you improve your ability to read and understand works of fiction like short stories, plays, and novels.
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- 5:00 If you need help understanding common literary devices found in works of fiction, such as metaphors and symbols, you may also want to take a look at our instructional video on [Understanding Figurative Language](#).
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- 5:15 Thanks for listening to this instructional video on [Annotating a Work of Fiction!](#)
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- 5:21 Visit the [Excelsior College Online Writing Lab](#) for more support with reading and writing skills.

