

How to Mark a Book

This outline addresses why you would ever want to mark in a book. For each reason, the outline gives specific strategies to achieve your goals in reading the book.

1. Interact with the book – talk back to it. You learn more from a conversation than you do from a lecture. (This is the text-to-self connection.)

- a. Typical marks
 - i. Question marks and questions – be a critical reader
 - ii. Exclamation marks – a great point, or I really agree!
 - iii. Smiley faces and other emoticons
 - iv. Color your favorite sections. Perhaps draw pictures in the margin that remind you about the passage's subject matter or events.
 - v. Pictures and graphic organizers. The pictures may express your overall impression of a paragraph, page, or chapter. The graphic organizer (Venn diagram, etc.) may give you a handy way to sort the material in a way that makes sense to you.
- b. Typical writing
 - i. Comments – agreements or disagreements
 - ii. Your personal experience
 1. Write a short reference to something that happened to you that the text reminds you of, or that the text helps you understand better
 2. Perhaps cross-reference to your diary or to your personal journal (e.g., "Diary, Nov. 29, 2004")
 - iii. Random associations
 1. Begin to trust your gut when reading! Does the passage remind you of a song? Another book? A story you read? Like some of your dreams, your associations may carry more psychic weight than you may realize at first. Write the association down in the margin!
 2. Cross-reference the book to other books making the same point. Use a shortened name for the other book – one you will remember, though. (e.g., "Harry Potter 3") (This is a text-to-text connection.)

2. Learn what the book teaches. (This is the text-to-world connection.)

- a. Underline, circle, or highlight key words and phrases.
- b. Cross-reference a term with the book's explanation of the term or where the book gives the term fuller treatment.
 - i. In other words, put a reference to another page in the book in the margin where you are reading. Use a page number.
 - ii. Then, return the favor at the place in the book to which you just referred. You now have a link so you can find both pages if you find one of them.
- c. Put your own summaries in the margin
 - i. If you summarize a passage in your own words, you will learn the material much better.
 - ii. Depending on how closely you wish to study the material, you may wish to summarize entire sections, paragraphs, or even parts of paragraphs.
 - iii. If you put your summaries in your books instead of separate notebooks, the book you read and the summary you wrote will reinforce each other. A positive synergy happens! You will also keep your book and your notes in one place.
- d. Leave a "trail" in the book that makes it easier to follow when you study the material again.
 - i. Make a trail by writing subject matter headings in the margins. You will find the material more easily the second time through.
 - ii. Bracket or highlight sections you think are important
- e. In the margin, start a working outline of the section you are reading. Use only two or three levels to start.

- f. Create your own index in the back of the book!
 - i. Do not set out to make a comprehensive index. Just add items that you want to find later.
 - ii. Decide on your own keywords – one or two per passage. What would you look for if you returned to the book in a few days? In a year?
 - iii. Use a blank page or pages in the back. Decide on how much space to put before and after the keyword. If your keyword starts with “g,” for instance, go about a quarter of the way through the page or pages you have reserved for your index and write the word there.
 - iv. Write down the keyword and the page number of the keyword. If that is not specific enough, write “T,” “M,” or “B” after the page number. Each of those letters tells you where to look on the page in question; the letters stand for “top,” “middle,” and “bottom,” respectively.
 - v. Does the book already have an index? Add to it with your own keywords to make the index more useful to you.
- g. Create a glossary at the beginning or end of a chapter or a book.
 - i. Every time you read a word you do not know that seems important for your purposes in reading the book, write it down in your glossary.
 - ii. In your glossary next to the word in question, put the page number of the word.
 - iii. Put a very short definition by each word in the glossary.

3. Pick up the author’s style. (This is the reading-to-writing connection.)

- a. Why? Because you are not born with a writing style. You pick it up. Perhaps there is something that you like about this author’s style, but you do not know what it is. Learn to analyze an author’s writing style in order to pick up parts of her style that becomes natural to you.
- b. How?
 - i. First, reflect a bit. What do you like about the writer’s style? If nothing occurs to you, consider the tone of the piece (humorous, passionate, etc.) Begin to wonder: how did the writer get the tone across? (This method works for discovering how a writer gets across tone, plot, conflict, and other things.)
 - ii. Look for patterns.
 - 1. Read a paragraph or two or three you really like. Read it over and over. What begins to stand out to you?
 - 2. Circle or underline parts of speech with different colored pens, pencils, or crayons. Perhaps red for verbs, blue for nouns, and green for pronouns.
 - 3. Circle or underline rhetorical devices with different colored writing instruments, or surround them with different geometric shapes, such as an oval, a rectangle, and a triangle.
 - a. What rhetorical devices?
 - i. How she mixes up lengths of sentences
 - ii. Sound devices – alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, repetition, internal rhymes, etc.
 - iii. You name it!
 - iii. Pick a different subject than that covered in the passage, and deliberately try to use the author’s patterns in your own writing.
 - iv. Put your writing aside for a few days, and then edit it. What remains of what you originally adopted from the writer’s style? If what remains is natural and well done, you may have made that part of her style part of your own style.