About Annotation

Almost all good readers literally interact with the texts they read by making notes in the margins. Academics have even been known to track down the personal libraries of famous writers just to see their *marginalia*, i.e. the notes that they scribbled in the margins of the books they read. If you have written nothing in the margins of a text, you might as well not have read it.

On resistance: Students sometimes tell me that they prefer not to write in their books because they want to resell them. My first response is, don't! Hold onto them and you may decide to read them again some day. If you can't resist getting $10 for a $50 text, then read with an erasable pencil (hi-lighting is useless anyway) or keep post-it notes handy and write on them. Yes, I'm serious about this! The only serious objection I can see to marking up a text is that doing so takes time. One cannot comment thoughtfully in the margins while speed-reading! But then, your English professor knows that you would never just skim the important texts assigned in this class.

What to note: the type of comments you make in the margin of your text should reflect your own thought processes as your read. There are no "right" comments. Here are some questions you might keep in mind as you develop the habit of reading with pencil in hand.

1. **What's interesting, puzzling, annoying, or beautiful in this text?**
2. **What words, ideas, or "moves" are repeated so frequently as to seem important?**
3. **What would I ask the author if he/she suddenly entered the room?**
4. **How would I talk back to the author if this were actually a dialogue?**
5. **What would I ask the teacher if he/she were in the room with me?**
6. **What words should I really look up in the dictionary?**
7. **What historical, biographical, or other fact might be helpful to investigate?**
8. **What other text (or place within this text) is alluded to by this passage?**
9. **What occurs as a possible essay topic related to this text?**
10. **What are we likely to discuss when we take up this text in class?**

P.A.S.T. /L.A.S.T. - **Poetry Response Prompt**

Consider this mnemonic and the associated questions in your first readings of a poem. However, artificial, it may lead you to consider aspects of a poem that you would otherwise neglect. Once you begin to become familiar with it, you may want to move more freely among the terms; eventually you will sense whether or not another set of elements is important to a poem--and focus there. As we discuss poems in class, you will also learn more precise literary terms. Remember that PAST/LAST is a deliberately simple prompt for reading which you will eventually outgrow!

Paraphrase - Can you briefly restate the most obvious thread of the poem? Think content.)	
Argument - Can you briefly recap its 'point' or claim if one is obvious?)	
Speaker - Is the speaker identifiable (singular)? gender, age, time period...?	
Title - What is the title? what expectations does it raise? how does it fit what follows?	
Language - Is it literal or figurative (symbol, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.)? Can you describe the diction?	
Attitude - Does the language suggest an attitude, tone mood, emotion, or general "feel"? What and how?	
Structure - What formal features seem worth noting: lines, stanza, rhyme, rhythm? Look for patterns and shifts.	
Theme - Does the poem suggest an overall theme (often an abstract idea, such as the familiar *carpe diem*)?	

- Sherwood

About Roman Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics"

A noted structuralist linguist, Roman Jakobson held that poetry could be analyzed in much the same as any form of human communication. This was a crucial point to make, since it implied that neither writing or speech are ever purely involved in conveying an idea. The referential content in all communication, is only 1/6 of the package, which is especially useful to remember with respect to literature. He laid out a model with six Aspects of language and six Functions (towards which language may be oriented):

6 FACTORS ("The constituitive **factors** in any speech event")

	CONTEXT MESSAGE	
ADDRESSER	-----------------------	**ADDRESSEE**
	CONTACT CODE	

6 FUNCTIONS

	REFERENTIAL POETIC	
EMOTIVE	-----------------------	**CONATIVE**
	PHATIC METALINGUAL	

Here is an improvistory mapping of Jakobson's FUNCTIONS/[Factors] to {language forms}.

	[context] **REFERNTIAL** {epic; journalism} [message] **POETIC** {poetry; pun; riddle}	
[addresser] **EMOTIVE** {lyric; diary}	--------------------------------	[addressee] **CONATIVE** {prayer; command}
	[contact] **PHATIC** {new ads; joke; shout} [code] **METALINGUAL** {meditation; philosophy; joke}	

Ears Opened Wide: A Systematic Prompt for Readers of Poetry

1. Addresser: Emotive 'expressive' of emotion, e.g. "tut, tut"	As you reread a poem, think first about the prominence of the addresser; is the *emotive* function of language hilighted? Do particular lines seem oriented toward setting the tone?
2. Addressee : Conative e.g. imperatives or orders	Are there direct, conative statements that connect with you the addressee? (And are the addressee and the reader implicitly one and the same? Sometimes a poem casts the reader in the role of one overhearing a conversation.)
3. Contact : Phatic establishing, maintaining, or verifying a channel, e.g. "um-hmm"	Is contact presumed? Are there *phatic* moments, where lines or words are employed to insure the communication? Whole poems may sometimes seem to be *phatic* gestures.
4. Context : Referential conveyance of information, the normally emphasized content aspect of language	What referential force does the poem carry? Are there informational passage, examples of what Jakobson calls 'object language,' statements about the world, things, ideas (falsifiable etc.)?
5. Code : Metalingual talking about the 'code,' e.g. "Do you follow?", "And what is a *sophomore*?"	The code, perhaps a standard English or stylized literary dialect, may be assumed as unproblematic or it may be very much at issue. Does the poem reference its own language?
6. Message : Poetic "the set toward . . . or focus on the message [i.e. the language] for its own sake," emphasizing texture, rhythm, sound, shape, etc.	The poetic function of language includes such poetic devices as figurative language (metaphor, simile, hyperbole) and sound-play (rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoiea), or other textural features of language. Are these features prominent in the poem? What uses do they serve?