How to Annotate Nonfiction Books Cleanly with Pencil Margin N

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A fully illustrated 32-step guide to annotating nonfiction books with clean pencil margin notes: choose the right tools, build a simple mark-up code, write notes you will reuse, and review what you keep.

Phase 1 — Choose Tools and Prepare the Book

1. **Choose a soft graphite pencil over a pen**
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2. **Keep a small sharpener and kneaded eraser handy**
   Keep a small sharpener and kneaded eraser handy.
3. **Test your pencil on a spare page**
   Test your pencil on a spare page.
4. **Avoid highlighters on thin paper**
   Avoid highlighters on thin paper.
5. **Write your name and date inside the cover**
   Write your name and date inside the cover.
6. **Check page margins before you start**
   Check page margins before you start.
7. **Decide if the book is yours to mark**
   Decide if the book is yours to mark.
8. **Set up a reading position with good light**
   Set up a reading position with good light.

Phase 2 — Build a Small Markup Code

9. **Define one symbol for a main idea**
   Define one symbol for a main idea.
10. **Use a second mark for supporting evidence**
    Use a second mark for supporting evidence.
11. **Circle only unfamiliar terms once**
    Circle only unfamiliar terms once.
12. **Add a question mark where you doubt the logic**
    Add a question mark where you doubt the logic.
13. **Write your legend on the endpaper**
    Write your legend on the endpaper.
14. **Limit yourself to four or five marks**
    Limit yourself to four or five marks.
15. **Leave the text itself mostly untouched**
    Leave the text itself mostly untouched.

16. Apply the code to one chapter first

Apply the code to one chapter first.

Phase 3 — Write Margin Notes You Will Reuse

17. Summarise a section in one short sentence

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18. Translate jargon into everyday language

Translate jargon into everyday language.

19. Record your reaction, not just the content

Record your reaction, not just the content.

20. Pose one question per chapter

Pose one question per chapter.

21. Cross-reference related pages

Cross-reference related pages.

22. Use arrow marks to show direction of argument

Use arrow marks to show direction of argument.

23. Tag the most useful passages with a page tab

Tag the most useful passages with a page tab.

24. End each chapter with a three-word takeaway

End each chapter with a three-word takeaway.

Phase 4 — Review, Extract and Maintain

25. Skim the marked margins first

Skim the marked margins first.

26. Copy the best notes into a notebook

Copy the best notes into a notebook.

27. Build a one-page chapter map

Build a one-page chapter map.

28. Quote with the exact page number

Quote with the exact page number.

29. Erase notes that no longer make sense

Erase notes that no longer make sense.

30. Review one annotated book a month

Review one annotated book a month.

31. Refine your legend as you read more

Refine your legend as you read more.

32. Pass a well-annotated copy on

Pass a well-annotated copy on.

Sources

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   https://owl.purdue.edu/

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Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/How-to-Annotate-Nonfiction-Books-Cleanly-With-Pencil-Margin-Notes. Correct