

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Annotation as Conversation: Digital Commentary in the Humanities Classroom

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Abstract

Digital annotation is often praised for participation without a sufficiently precise account of how interface and prompt design make interpretive reasons visible. This article asks how a model annotation protocol can organize accountable disagreement in humanities teaching. It uses selected public-domain passages from Austen's "Persuasion," Douglass's "Narrative," Tagore's "The Home and the World," and Woolf's "Jacob's Room" as textual cases. The method is a textual and design analysis of modeled annotation moves, reply structures, evidence links, and revision opportunities; it is not a participant study and reports no classroom outcomes. The analysis argues that prompts organized by interpretive function make disagreement more legible, that anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability without guaranteeing depth, and that modeled revision after response can turn annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry. The contribution is an operational vocabulary for evaluating annotation design without treating participation itself as evidence of learning. Claims about student behavior, instructional effectiveness, or platform usability require future empirical research and are outside this article's evidentiary scope.

Keywords: digital annotation; humanities pedagogy; interpretation; classroom; evidence

1 Introduction

This comparative study addresses how structured digital annotation can support interpretive plurality without dissolving standards of evidence. Its corpus comprises public-domain passages from Austen's "Persuasion," Douglass's "Narrative," Tagore's "The Home and the World," and Woolf's "Jacob's Room," used to model a classroom annotation protocol. The central claim is that prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement. That proposition matters because digital pedagogy can preserve openness of interpretation while making reasons visible. Attention therefore falls on modeled annotation moves and their relation to specific textual features.

The analytical problem is intentionally narrower than a general history of conversational annotation. Within these texts, dialogic annotation is assessed through annotation threads and their relation to specific textual features. Its definition changes only when those features alter the interpretation.

The argument develops through three findings. First, prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement. Second, anchoring comments to textual features improves ac-

countability but does not by itself ensure depth. Third, revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry. Their convergence indicates that conversational annotation is neither a decorative effect nor a label attached after interpretation. The argument remains proportionate to the textual selection.

The research question is how prompt, reply, evidence-link, and revision design can make interpretive disagreement accountable. The objective is conceptual and textual: the article analyzes modeled annotation structures, not participants or classroom outcomes. It establishes the critical context before presenting the corpus and method, then develops three propositions, discussion, limitations, and conclusion.

Recent annotation scholarship treats marginal comment as a social and pedagogical practice rather than a layer added after reading. Kalir and Garcia define annotation as a means of making thinking visible and contestable [1]. Samuels and McGann demonstrate how deliberately transformative reading procedures can expose interpretive assumptions [2].

2 Dialogic annotation

The descriptive problem concerns how modeled annotations attach to textual features; the interpretive problem concerns why their organization supports accountable dialogue rather than a sequence of isolated comments. Interpretive communities clarify how standards of textual relevance are socially learned [3]. Work on scale distinguishes a local design analysis from claims about digital pedagogy generally [4]. Dialogism supports the treatment of replies as relational interpretive acts [5]. Accounts of digital materiality foreground the role of interface structure in shaping cognition [6]. Humanistic theories of constructed evidence reinforce the need to distinguish visible participation from demonstrated learning [7].

3 Textual Cases and Modeled Annotation Design

The textual selection brings together public-domain passages from Austen's "Persuasion" [8], Douglass's "Narrative" [9], Tagore's "The Home and the World" [10], and Woolf's "Jacob's Room" [11]. The sample is comparative and concept-driven rather than statistically representative. Each text supplies a different case for modeling annotation moves in relation

to specific textual features.

The method is textual and design-based humanities analysis comparing modeled annotation moves, reply structures, evidence links, and revision opportunities. No students or other participants were observed, recruited, surveyed, or assessed, and no claims about learning outcomes are made.

Dialogic annotation is tested through modeled changes in reply structure and relation to specific textual features. The procedure records position, recurrence, interruption, and result before assigning interpretive weight. That order matters because a repeated prompt may retain its wording while changing function in a different reply sequence. Claims about classroom behavior, instructional effectiveness, reception, or prevalence are withheld because the present method does not supply that evidence.

Source control is integral to the claim about dialogic annotation. Differences among editions, transcriptions, reproductions, restorations, recordings, or performance documents can alter the very feature being compared. The article therefore treats the version named in each reference as part of the evidence. Where the supplied bibliography does not yet identify that version precisely, the interpretation is provisional at that point; it cannot support a locator-dependent assertion until the author checks the consulted source.

4 Prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement

The opening analytical pattern can be stated directly: prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement. This temporal dimension is essential. The finding therefore concerns organization, not inventory.

Close comparison reveals that the pattern operates at more than one scale. The resulting form is recursive. Interpretation advances, but it also returns to revise what seemed settled. This recursive quality explains why conversational annotation can remain coherent without becoming predictable.

The first proposition is strongest where annotation threads and their link to specific textual features do more than recur. To count as support for the claim that prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement, an occurrence must be prepared by an preceding expectation and must alter the result of what follows. Annotation as Conversation therefore reads re-

currence with placement: identical words, sonorities, shapes, gestures, or interface elements may carry different force when their structural position changes. This criterion keeps dialogic annotation tied to sequence instead of treating visibility alone as proof.

5 Comparative readings: Annotation as Conversation

The baseline reading concerns Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. The reading tests the proposition that prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement by restricting attention to annotation threads and their link to specific textual features. It then identifies which surrounding relations are necessary for that account.

In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, the proposition that prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement is evaluated through placement, not keyword recurrence. The reading asks what prepares each occurrence of annotation threads and their relation to specific textual features, which agent or structural layer controls it, and what result follows. A detail counts as evidence only when its surrounding sequence changes the available judgment. This restriction prevents the case from being reduced to an example chosen after the thesis was formed.

A close reading of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* must therefore document the first relevant occurrence of annotation threads and their connection to specific textual features, the expectation active at that moment, and the effect that distinguishes it from background recurrence. The case supports Annotation as Conversation only if those three points can be located in the consulted version. A general resemblance to the other cases is not enough; the episode must show why the proposition about dialogic annotation is required to explain its organization.

The next reading, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, tests the distributive dimension of the argument. Here the governing question is whether anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth. This is not understood as a defect in reliability.

Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* changes the scale of comparison. Here dialogic annotation is read through the distribution of access, emphasis, and response among texts. The relevant question is not whether the same surface feature returns, but whether its return gives a dif-

ferent participant, voice, register, or position the capacity to redirect interpretation. That distributive test supplies the pressure behind the claim that anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth.

For Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the principal counter-reading treats the observed distribution as a genre convention with no special bearing on dialogic annotation. The article answers only at the level of annotation threads and their interaction to specific textual features: it asks whether a transfer of access or emphasis produces a subsequent effect that convention alone leaves unexplained. If it does not, the second proposition weakens. If it does, the case clarifies how formal hierarchy becomes an event rather than a static arrangement.

The third text examined is Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* and gives priority to revision over initial recognition. The interpretive test is whether revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry.

The value of Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* is retrospective. Ensuing passages are reread against the first account of annotation threads and their link to specific textual features, allowing the article to distinguish repetition from revision. If the ensuing event merely restates the earlier one, the proposition that revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry receives little support. If it changes the status of what the reader, listener, or viewer already encountered, the case shows how dialogic annotation acquires formal memory.

Verification in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* calls for two locators: one for the initial treatment of annotation threads and their relation to specific textual features and one for the moment that alters its status. The interval between them is analytically important because it determines what can be remembered, projected, or misrecognized. Recording both locations prevents the later reading from being projected backward as if it had been available from the start, and it gives the claim about dialogic annotation a visible temporal basis.

The fourth text, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, functions as a resistant comparison.

Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* remains in the selection because it resists easy

synthesis. Its treatment of annotation threads and their relation to specific textual features tests how far the claim that prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement can travel before medium, genre, or historical circumstance demands qualification. The comparison does not convert resistance into confirmation. It records which part of the proposition holds, which part narrows, and which further source would be required to distinguish between rival accounts.

The resistant role of Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* also limits the article's vocabulary. If medium or genre changes the operation of annotation threads and their interaction to specific textual features, the comparison names that difference before proposing an analogy. The case may therefore support only part of the claim that prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement. Such partial support is informative: it identifies the condition under which dialogic annotation ceases to explain the evidence and marks the point where another historical or formal account should take over.

6 Anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth

The next result proposes that anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth. This pattern shifts analysis from isolated form toward distribution. The textual selection repeatedly makes such allocation perceptible.

The second proposition asks who or what receives the force identified in the first. If anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth, then position is inseparable from access: a voice, instrument, figure, object, space, or interface option carries weight partly because it can initiate, interrupt, answer, or withhold. Annotation as Conversation traces this allocation through annotation threads and their relation to specific textual features. The resulting hierarchy is not assumed in advance; it is inferred from the capacity to redirect subsequent action or interpretation, including cases where peripheral placement proves more consequential than organizational centrality.

7 Revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry

The final result argues that revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry. Return, correction, reframing, and delayed consequence are therefore analytical events. They reveal how a work stores difference and activates it later.

The first identifies a process that directs attention. The second shows that attention and authority are distributed. The third explains how later events revise that distribution. This sequence supports the central thesis that conversational annotation is historically variable and formally organized.

The third proposition is tested retrospectively. For the claim that revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry, later evidence must change the status of something already encountered; simple repetition is insufficient. Annotation as Conversation therefore rereads earlier annotation threads and their connection to specific textual features after each return, correction, re-entry, or altered frame. This backward movement reveals whether the text stores a difference and activates it later. Where the earlier event remains unaffected, the proposed revision has not occurred and the claim about dialogic annotation loses explanatory force.

8 Discussion: What Dialogic Annotation Changes

The three propositions alter one another. If prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement, then anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth cannot be treated as a separate theme; it describes who or what controls the first process. The claim that revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry adds a temporal test, asking whether subsequent events confirm, narrow, or overturn an initial inference. Annotation as Conversation therefore explains dialogic annotation through ordered dependence rather than a list of recurring devices.

Cross-case analysis additionally implies that digital pedagogy can preserve the openness of interpretation while making reasons visible. This outcome does not depend on universal agreement about every example.

Counter-reading is used here as an analytical control. For the proposition that

prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement, the strongest alternative is one that explains the same sequence without assigning it the same function. The proposition that anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth must then show why distribution, rather than mere recurrence, accounts for the contrast. Finally, revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry is tested by asking what later event would have to be absent for the interpretation to fail. These tests make disagreement about Annotation as Conversation local and answerable.

The intervention of Annotation as Conversation is not the discovery of an unnoticed motif. Its contribution is to specify how dialogic annotation operates when the same feature changes function through sequence. Existing vocabulary can name the relevant elements, yet naming does not explain why one occurrence prepares an inference and another revises it. By keeping annotation threads and their link to specific textual features connected to position and consequence, the article turns a broad thematic observation into a claim that can be evaluated passage by passage and case by case.

This distinction also changes the status of absence. A missing response, withheld transition, unoccupied space, unrealized cadence, or unnamed agent is not automatically meaningful. It enters the argument only when the surrounding organization creates an expectation that the absence modifies. For Annotation as Conversation, such negative evidence is judged by the same standard as a visible feature: it must be locatable, connected to sequence, and capable of changing the account of dialogic annotation.

The comparative reading's main limitation is that the article offers a documented research design rather than claims about a completed human-subjects classroom experiment. It does not establish reception, intention, prevalence, or causal effect. The absence of those methods is acknowledged rather than disguised.

The value of Annotation as Conversation lies in its account of attention. Dialogic annotation determines which details become available early, which remain peripheral, and which acquire force only in retrospect. This is a structural claim with historical consequences, but it is not a substitute for audience evidence. Its reach is confined to the named texts and to the editorial or documentary versions listed in the references.

9 Conclusion

The guiding question concerned how structured digital annotation can support interpretive plurality without dissolving standards of evidence. Through design-based humanities analysis comparing annotation moves, reply structures, evidence links, and revision opportunities, it argued that prompts organized by interpretive function produce more legible disagreement; that anchoring comments to textual features improves accountability but does not by itself ensure depth; and that revision after peer response turns annotation from reaction into cumulative inquiry. These claims converge on a relational account of conversational annotation.

The broader conclusion is that digital pedagogy can preserve the openness of interpretation while making reasons visible.

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