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Assignment 3

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## Summary

In “How to Mark a Book” (*The Saturday Review of Literature*, July 6, 1941), Mortimer J. Adler urges readers to see that writing in their books is not destroying the book but reading it effectively and showing love and ownership. He points out that people mistake buying a book for owning it because true ownership is not about having the physical object but about incorporating its ideas into one’s own. Adler describes three types of book owners: those who buy books for show only, those who buy books to read but are afraid of handling them too heavily, and, true owners, those who buy books and reads and annotates them as much as they like. Adler then addresses the contention that preserving a valuable edition from marks is acceptable by comparing a book as a work of art to paintings and music. The book’s soul, like music, is separate from its physical shape, unlike a painting or sculpture where form and content are one. After this clarification, Adler enumerates the benefits to reading of writing in a book which includes the fact that it forces readers to be alert, to be critical, and to remember. Following explanations of the importance of writing to reading is a list of techniques of marking books such as different methods of emphasizing text, labeling organization, summarizing ideas, and recording commentary, advising book owners truly adverse to writing in the books themselves to write on note paper instead. Finally, Adler accepts that the remaining problems with marking books meaning that they can never be lent are true because those personally marked volumes have already become “a part of you.”

## Textual Analysis

The purpose of this persuasive article, in contrast to its title “How to Mark a Book,” is to give readers reasons why it is important to mark a book. This is made clear in the last two sentences of the first paragraph. Adler, the writer, supports his idea by using counter arguments throughout his article.

The first counter-argument—marking is not an act of destroying a book but a way of showing appreciation—takes up paragraphs 2–8. Paragraphs 3 and 5 explain the right way to own books while paragraph 6 describes three types of book owners, reinforcing the idea that true ownership of books means spending time reading them thoughtfully and marking them. In paragraphs 7 and 8, the writer uses comparisons and contrasts to counter opposition that he anticipates, conceding that rare books should not be marked just as great paintings should not be defaced. However, most books are like musical scores where the true appreciation is shown by the marks made by the people reading them.

From paragraphs 9 through to 14, the author explains why marking a book cannot be separated from reading. Three brief reasons are provided in paragraph 9 and elaborated on right after that. Examples are used to emphasize that marking is especially necessary for great books, which require readers’ utmost concentration and active thinking. From paragraphs 12 to 13 the writer answers the opposition that he anticipates saying that writing down your reactions to what you read will better enrich your understanding, and the notes you make will help you to remember the ideas in the book. In the next paragraph, Adler concludes that marking a book enables the reader to have a conversation with its author.

In paragraphs 15 and 16, Adler suggests several useful methods for marking books wisely and making use of the space in the endpapers. From paragraphs 17 to the end of the article, he counters three final possible objections to marking books.