

AP English Language and Composition Dialectical Journal for Selected Work of Nonfiction

What is a dialectical journal?

“A dialectical journal is a conversation between you and what you are reading. You simply write down passages that make you think, or interest you, and write about **your thoughts**. This process is an important way to understand a piece of literature. By writing about literature, you make your own meaning of the work in order to truly understand a literary work. When you do this yourself, then the text belongs to you—you have made it yours. The passages are there for everyone to read; however, the connections and interpretations are uniquely yours. You are neither right nor wrong in your response. So be willing to take risks and be honest.”

– Definition from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

The term “*dialectic*” means “**the art of practice of arriving at the truth by using conversation involving question and answer.**” Think of your dialectical journal as a series of conversation with the texts we will be reading throughout this course. This process is meant to help you develop a stronger understanding of the texts you read, and you will be utilizing this journal to incorporate personal responses to the texts, ideas about concepts covered in class, and our class discussions. You will find that this strategy is a useful way to process what you are reading, prepare yourself for group discussion, and gather textual evidence for analysis.

The **purpose** of a dialectical journal is to **identify significant pieces of text** and **explain the significance**. It is another form of highlighting/annotating text and should be used to **think about, digest, summarize, question, clarify, critique, and remember** what is read. It is a way to take notes on what is read using the actual text, so that when you are asked to write an essay about or utilize the information from the text you do not have to re-read the entire piece. Instead, you can search your notes for direct quotes to use as supporting evidence for your opinions. A dialectical journal is also an effective way to assess your comprehension and can be used with any form of writing: textbook, short story, novel, essay, poem, newspaper article, scientific journal, or any piece of writing students choose.

Procedure:

1. As you read, choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the left-hand column of a t-chart; ALWAYS include page numbers.
2. In the right column, write your response to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, and comments on each passage).
3. The left column is used for direct quotations from the reading, and the right column is used for commenting on these direct quotations in the left column. Your comments should be developed and demonstrate higher level thinking, which goes well beyond plot summary. I am looking for evidence that you are thinking as you are reading.

For every nonfiction book that we read, you will be required to write **at least twenty entries**. You will start off writing ten passages utilizing the templates and information on **pages 2 and 3** with the other ten utilizing the templates and information on **pages 4-6**. Each text response will be worth five points for a total of 100 points for this assignment. Points will be deducted from the text side for failure to document accurately and completely according to the model provided. Points will be deducted on the Commentary/Reaction Connection side for summarizing and incomplete analysis. Each response must be **at least 50 to 100 words in length**.

Examples for the first ten dialectical journal entries:

from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee:

Passages from the text + the page # (1 point)	Commentary/Reaction/Connection (4 points)
<p>“There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go....nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb Great County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.” (21)</p>	<p>Apparently, Maycomb is also a very slow, sleepy town that is pretty isolated from everything else. This seems to be especially true since they only have a “vague” notion of FDR’s speech (an allusion to the Depression of the 1930’s – must be the era in which the story takes place) and there is “nothing” outside of Maycomb County. I wonder why they see the world this way – maybe people don’t travel because of the depression or because that’s just not what people did. It is interesting to me that it seems so much like my hometown, except that people in Maycomb have “vague optimism.” I feel as if people don’t feel optimistic now. I certainly don’t know what I am going to do after high school and college. During the Depression, about what did Americans generally have to feel optimistic? They just didn’t know any better.</p>

from *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien:

Passages from the text + the page # (1 point)	Comments/Reaction/Connection (4 points)
<p>“-they carried like freight trains; they carried it on their backs and shoulders and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry.” (2)</p>	<p>O’Brien chooses to end the first section of the novel with this sentence. He provides excellent visual details of what each soldier in Vietnam would carry for day-to-day fighting. He makes you feel the physical weight of what soldiers have to carry for simple survival. When you combine the emotional weight of loved ones at home, the fear of death, and the responsibility for the men you fight with, with this physical weight, you start to understand what soldiers in Vietnam dealt with every day. This quote sums up the confusion that the men felt about the reasons they were fighting the war, and how they clung to the only certainty – things they had to carry – in a confusing world where normal rules were suspended.</p>

Instructions/Choosing Passages from the Text for the First Ten Dialectical Journals:

Look for quotes that seem significant, powerful, thought provoking or puzzling. For example, you might record:

- Effective &/or creative use of stylistic or literary devices
- Passages that remind you of your own life or something you've seen before
- Structural shifts or turns in the plot
- A passage that makes you realize something you hadn't seen before
- Examples of patterns: recurring images, ideas, colors, symbols or motifs
- Passages with confusing language or unfamiliar vocabulary
- Events you find surprising or confusing
- Passages that illustrate a particular character or setting

Responding to the Text:

You can *respond* to the text in a variety of ways. The most important point to remember is that your observations should be *specific and detailed*. You can write as much as you want for each entry.

Basic Responses

- Raise questions about the beliefs and values implied in the text
- Give your personal reactions to the passage
- Discuss the words, ideas, or actions of the author or character(s)
- Tell what it reminds you of from your own experiences
- Write about what it makes you think or feel
- Agree or disagree with a character or the author

HINTS:

Sample Sentence Starters:

I really don't understand this because...
I really dislike/like this idea because...
I think the author is trying to say that...
This passage reminds me of a time in my life when...
If I were (name of character) at this point I would...
This part doesn't make sense because...

Higher Level Responses:

Analyze the text for use of literary devices (tone, structure, style, imagery)
Make connections between different characters or events in the text
Make connections to a different text (or film, song, etc...)
Discuss the words, ideas, or actions of the author or character(s)
Consider an event or description from the perspective of a different character
Analyze a passage and its relationship to the story as a whole

(These are two separate boxes not meant to line-up/correlate)

Instructions/Choosing Passages for the Second Set of Dialectical Journals (#11 through #20):

In your journal or word document for dialectical journals #11-#20, create a table like the one below, and label one for each of the four required categories:

- Category #1: Form and Structure
- Category #2: Purpose/Tone/Style
- Category #3: Imagery and/or Detail
- Category #4: Rhetorical Devices

TEMPLATES for Each Category:

CATEGORY 1: <u>Form and Structure</u> (at least 2 Passages for this category)	
<p>Important Excerpts/Passages from the Text</p> <p>Use quotes from the text in quotation marks followed by pages numbers in parenthesis.</p>	<p>Your Commentary/Reaction/Connection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is happening? How much time is covered? • What patterns do you notice? <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluate/Question/Explain/Predict/Connect</p>
CATEGORY 2: <u>Purpose /Tone /Style</u> (at least 2 passages for this category)	
<p>Important Excerpts/Passages from the Text</p> <p>Use quotes from the text in quotation marks followed by pages numbers in parenthesis.</p>	<p>Your Commentary/Reaction/Connection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the author trying to accomplish? • What argument(s) is he/she trying to make? • What is the author's attitude toward the subject? • How is TONE revealed through DICTION and SYNTAX? <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluate/Question/Explain/Predict/Connect</p>
CATEGORY 3: <u>Imagery and or Detail</u> (at least 2 passages for this category)	
<p>Important Excerpts/Passages from the Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use quotes from the text in quotation marks followed by pages numbers in parenthesis. 	<p>Your Commentary/Reaction/Connection</p> <p>The imagery of a literary work comprises the set of images that appeal to the senses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for recurring images (light/darkness, colors, clothing, odors, sounds). • Point out details (numbers, facts, description) the author uses to support the argument. • How are these images and/or details used? • What emotions do they EVOKE? <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluate/Question/Explain/Predict/Connect</p>
CATEGORY 4: <u>Rhetorical Devices</u> (Examples of Rhetorical Devices - at least 3 passages)	
<p>Important Excerpts/Passages from the Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use quotes from the text in quotation marks followed by pages numbers in parenthesis. 	<p>Your Commentary/Reaction/Connection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for examples of LOGOS (an appeal to the audience using LOGIC), PATHOS (an appeal to the audience's EMOTIONS), and ETHOS (an appeal to the audience's ETHICAL or MORAL BELIEFS) as well as the rhetorical devices below. <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluate/Question/Explain/Predict/Connect</p>

***DO not type your comment/reaction in a bullet format; instead, type it in a paragraph format.**

Elements of Literary Style to Help You with the Four Categories for Dialectical Journals #11 through #20:

1. Sentence Structure: Are the sentences long or short? Why do they change? Is the word-order straightforward or unconventionally crafted?
2. Diction: Is the writing tight and efficient, or elaborate and long-winded?
3. Vocabulary: Are the words technical, flowery, colloquial, cerebral, obscure, or.....?
4. Tone: What is the author's attitude?
5. Word Color/Word Sound: How much does the language call attention to or depend on the quality of its sound through alliteration, assonance, consonance, dissonance, unusual word choice, etc?
6. Paragraphs/Chapter Structure: Are the paragraphs short, or are they enormous blocks running across the page?
7. Experimentation in Language: Are there any unusual techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness, mixing styles and genres, unusual layout on the page, breaking rules of grammar and form, and so on?

75 rhetorical terms utilized for persuasion:

adage	epigram	refute	zeugma
allegory	figurative language	rhetoric	ethos
alliteration	figure of speech	rhetorical modes	pathos
allusion	hortatory	rhetorical question	logos
ambiguous	hyperbole	rhetorical triangle	exigence
anaphora	imagery	satire	epistrophe
antanaclasis	induction	scheme	
anecdote	inversion	dependent clause	
antimetabole	irony	independent clause	
antithesis	juxtaposition	sentence patterns	
aphorism	metaphor	simile	
appositive	metonymy	source	
archaic diction	nominalization	speaker	
assumption	oxymoron	straw man	
asyndeton	pacing	style	
claim	paradox	syllogism	
colloquial/ism	parallelism	syntax	
concession	parody	synthesize	
credible	persona	tone	
deduction	personification	trope	
denotation	polemic	understatement	
diction	polysyndeton	voice (in grammar)	
	propaganda	voice (in narrative)	

***Utilize Google for definitions and examples**

Rubric for Dialectical Journal:

Critical Reader (very detailed, elaborate responses): 90 – 100

- Extra effort is evident.
- Your quotes are relevant and thought provoking.
- You can “read between the lines” of the text.
- You consider meaning of the text in a universal sense.
- You create new meaning through connections with your own experiences or other texts
- You “carry on a dialogue” with the writer; you question, agree, disagree, appreciate, and object.
- Sentences are grammatically correct.

Connected Reader (pretty detailed responses): 80-89

- A solid effort is evident.
- You include an adequate number of legible entries.
- Your quotes are relevant and connect to the themes.
- Entries exhibit insight and thoughtful analysis.
- You construct a thoughtful interpretation of the text.
- You show some ability to make meaning of what you read.
- You create some new meaning through connections with your own experiences and the text.
- You explain the general significance.
- You raise interesting questions.
- You explain why you agree or disagree with the text.

Thoughtful Reader (somewhat detailed responses): 75-79

- Sentences are mostly correct with a few careless spelling and grammatical errors.
- You selected quotes that may be interesting to you but that don’t necessarily connect the themes of the novel.
- Entries exhibit insight and thoughtful analysis at times.
- You make connections but explain with little detail.
- You rarely make new meaning from the reading.
- You ask simple questions of the text.
- You may agree or disagree but don’t support your views.

Literal Reader (simple, factual responses): 70-74

- Entries exhibit limited insight or none at all.
- You accept the text literally.
- You are reluctant to create meaning from the text.
- You make few connections which lack detail.
- You are sometimes confused by clear or difficult sections of the text.

Limited Reader (perfunctory responses): below 70

- Very little effort is evident.
- You find the text confusing but make no attempt to “figure it out.”
- You create little or no meaning from the text.
- You make an occasional connection to the text, and the ideas lack development.
- Sentences contain numerous grammatical and spelling errors.