

How to Complete a Dialectical Journal

What Is a Dialectical Journal?

A dialectical journal is a reading strategy that helps you actively engage with a text. Instead of simply summarizing what you read, you record important passages and respond to them with your own thinking. The goal of a dialectical journal is not to prove that you read the text. The goal is to demonstrate that you **thought about the text**. Strong entries show curiosity, analysis, and engagement with ideas—the same skills you will use throughout AP Seminar.

The word *dialectical* refers to a conversation. In this assignment, you are having a "conversation" with the text by questioning, analyzing, connecting, and evaluating the author's ideas.

This process will help you:

- Read more critically
- Identify significant ideas and themes
- Develop analytical thinking skills
- Prepare for AP Seminar discussions and writing assignments
- Gather evidence that can be used later in essays and presentations

AP Seminar Focus Questions

As you read, consider:

1. What is the author's central claim or message?
2. What evidence is used to support that claim?
3. What perspectives are included or excluded?
4. What assumptions does the author make?
5. What larger issues or themes emerge?
6. What questions remain unanswered?
7. How does this text connect to real-world problems and contemporary issues?

Sample Dialectic Journal Entry from TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Text Evidence (Quote or Passage) with page number	Analysis of Quote or Passage
<p>"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." (Chapter 3, pg. 31)</p>	<p>This quote is significant because it introduces one of the novel's central themes: empathy. Atticus teaches Scout that understanding others requires looking beyond our own experiences and considering their perspectives. This lesson becomes especially significant later in the novel when the community judges Tom Robinson without truly understanding him. The quote also connects to modern issues involving prejudice and stereotypes. I wonder how many of the conflicts in the novel could have been avoided if characters had followed Atticus's advice.</p>
<p>"The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience." (Chapter 11, pg. 122)</p>	<p>Atticus suggests that moral decisions should not be based solely on what most people believe. This idea is important because Atticus defends Tom Robinson even though many people in Maycomb disagree with him. The quote raises questions about the responsibility individuals have to stand up against injustice. It connects to historical events such as the Civil Rights Movement, where many people challenged unfair laws despite public opposition. This makes me wonder whether most people are willing to follow their conscience when doing so comes with personal consequences.</p>

What to Include in the Left Column (Text Evidence)

- Select quotes or passages that are thought-provoking, surprising important to the author's argument, connected to major themes, rich in literary or rhetorical techniques, and/or relevant to contemporary issues
- Always include the exact quotation, the page number of the quote or passage, and the speaker, if applicable.

What to Include in the Right Column (Analysis)

Your response should go beyond summary. Consider the following:

<p>Analysis Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Why is this passage significant?● What is the author trying to communicate?● How does this contribute to a larger theme or argument? <p>Sentence Starters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>This passage is significant because...</i>● <i>The author emphasizes _____ through...</i>● <i>This reveals that...</i>	<p>Questioning Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● What does this idea make you wonder?● What information is missing?● What assumptions is the author making? <p>Sentence Starters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>I wonder why...</i>● <i>What would happen if...</i>● <i>The author seems to assume that...</i>
<p>Connections Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● How does this relate to another text?● How does it connect to current events?● How does it connect to historical events or personal experiences? <p>Sentence Starters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>This reminds me of...</i>● <i>This connects to the issue of...</i>● <i>Similar ideas appear in...</i>	<p>Evaluation Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Do you agree or disagree?● Is the evidence convincing?● What are the strengths or weaknesses of the argument? <p>Sentence Starters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <i>I agree/disagree because...</i>● <i>The author's reasoning is effective because...</i>● <i>This argument may be limited because...</i>

Strong AP Seminar Responses	Weak AP Seminar Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Go beyond summary✓ Examine the author's purpose, claims, evidence, and reasoning✓ Consider multiple perspectives✓ Connect ideas to broader social, cultural, political, scientific, or ethical issues✓ Ask thoughtful questions✓ Demonstrate critical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Simply restate the quote✗ Say only "I agree" or "I disagree"✗ Summarize the chapter✗ Provide one-sentence reactions without analysis

Name _____

School _____

Summer Reading Dialectic Journal

Everyone must view the following [speech](#) by Brene Brown.

Choose from one of the following texts below:

American Born Chinese, by Gene Luen Yang

Long Way Down, by Jason Reynolds

Love Hate and Other Filters, by Samira Ahmed

American Street, by Ibi Zoboi

Scythe, by Neal Shusterman

Not if I See You First, by Eric Lindstrom

NOTE: You must have at least 20 entries in your dialectic journal to begin the school year and will be due the first week of school. You will use this information during instruction and activities in Unit 1.

Text Evidence (Quote or Passage) with page number	Analysis of Quote or Passage

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