

How to Keep a Dialectical Journal

The word "dialectical" means relating to the logical discussion of ideas and opinions. Good readers often keep something called a *dialectical journal* when they read a text as a way to track some of its big ideas along the way.

Simply stated, a dialectical journal is a place for you to record and react to important moments in the text. You will find these naturally as you read...

something will come up that will make you say, "a-ha!" or "Wow, that's interesting..." When that happens, copy the quote into your journal, cite the page number, and write a few sentences of notes where you explain your thinking as it related to what you have read.

In a dialectical journal, you have a lot of freedom to write. Some ideas may be:

- details that seem important to you
- questions you have about the plot, characters, or conflicts in this passage
- something interesting or surprising
- a personal connection to something in your own life (*This reminds me of a time that I...*)
- a connection to some other work of literature, a song, or a film
- patterns that you notice, or possible symbols or motifs that are developing

The sample dialectical journal on this page is one student's work while reading *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. Ideally, a dialectical journal should include pages and pages of entries, as it is an ongoing "logical discussion of ideas and opinions" as you make your way through the text. The purple text shows the kind of connections that the student made just as points of reference.

The page below is a template for a dialectical journal. You may wish to keep this file electronically or print it out to handwrite your entries. Alternatively, you might prefer to keep your journal in a one subject marble or spiral-bound notebook.

In the first column: Write down a direct quote from the text.

In the second column: cite the page number where the quote appears in the text

In the third column: Write your response/connection to the quote.

***In the fourth column (optional):** Explain the significance of the quote—explain why it is important to the plot/character development, etc.

Exemplary Sample Dialectical Journal Entries (Quotes and Notes)		
Student Name: Bea Smart Date: July 2007		Book Title/Author: <i>Hatchet</i> , Gary Paulsen Total pages: 195
(Quotes) From Text	Pg #	(Notes) From Me
"Thanks. It's really nice." But the words sounded hollow, even to Brian.	p. 8	"Why does Brian feel that way about getting a hatchet from his Mom? If the words sound hollow to Brian, he must not mean it. Why is he mad at his Mom?" <i>Asking questions</i>
"No roads, no trails, no clearings. Just the lakes, and it came to him that he would have to use a lake for landing. If he went down into the trees he was certain to die."	p. 23	I can't imagine keeping my cool in a situation like this. I'd be on my cell phone, freaking out & he's trying to land the plane! I guess it's important to keep your cool in a crisis. <i>Reaction to text</i>
"Now, with the thought of the burger, the emptiness roared at him. He could not believe the hunger, had never felt this way. The lake water had filled his stomach, but left it hungry, and not it demanded food, screamed for food."		It's weird how Brian's stomach is like a character now, driving his behavior. I've been hungry before, but never like that. Is he going to start eating things that are poison because he is so hungry? <i>Observation of author craft and connections</i>

Image from the Webster Central School District, Webster, NY: websterschools.org

Quotation from the Text	Page Number	Your Response/Connection (find personal meaning)	So What?*(tell why this quote is important to the story)