

Keeping a Dialectical Notebook

Choose a notebook of a size you feel comfortable writing in and that is easily transportable.

The concept behind a dialectical notebook comes from the Greek word *dilektos*, which means “ conversation, discussion” in search of the truth. As an active and critical reader, you want to engage in a conversation or discussion with the author of a text. In this way you build your critical thinking skills and have a better grasp of the text’s content. Essentially, this is how you make meaning. In turn, making meaning of what you are reading is what makes learning exciting and fulfilling. It will also help you remember what you’ve read and be able to apply it in other situations.

To set up your dialectical notebook you are going to take notes on what you read only on the right pages, which you will label “text.” Here you will write down the most important points of the text that you are reading or watching. You might record quotations here or specific notations about the text. It’s a good idea to note the page number of the text in the margin next to specific notes. When you finish you’ll have a summary of the material.

Label the pages on the left side “response,” which is where you will write your personal reactions. This is where you “talk with” or “talk back” to the author. On this page you might make connections between what you’ve experienced as it relates to the text, or something else you’ve read or seen. You can ask questions here, make comments and record ideas that have piqued your interest.

In this way your response runs parallel with the text, and you are actually creating an intellectual history of your reading and thinking experience—which should also be a seedbed for your papers. Keeping this notebook will guarantee that you will advance your critical thinking skills and will no doubt result in your writing better papers.