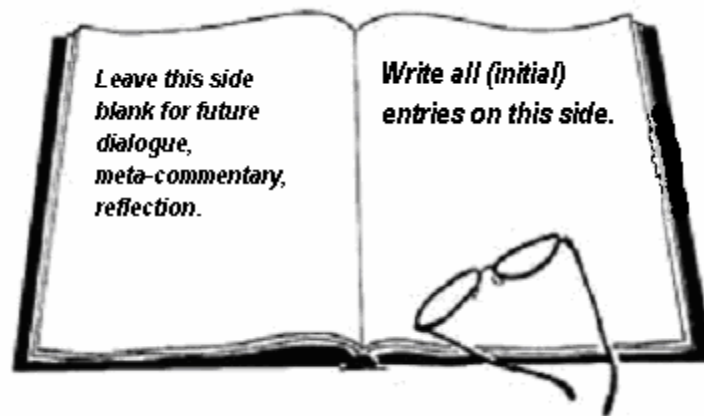


## *The Logistics of Keeping a Dialogue Journal*

*What's a Dialogue Journal?* According to Ann Berthoff, the researcher who developed this assignment (something she calls a “dialectical notebook”), “Here is how it works: the dialectical notebook is a double-entry journal with the two pages facing one another in dialogue. On one side are observations, sketches, noted impressions, passages copied out, jottings on readings or other responses; on the facing page are notes on these notes, responses to the responses—in current jargon, ‘meta-comment’” (12).

In order to promote this dialogue and reflection we've been talking about—with yourself as the writer and the reader of your own texts and with the texts you read and explore through discussion and rereading—I encourage my students to set up what we call a “Dialogue Journal.”

Set the Dialogue Journal up so you have the physical space available for a later written “conversation” to take place in response to initial observations and ideas. At times you will be responding to these previous entries yourself. At other times, a classmate will be responding to your entries. Sometimes your instructor may respond or your tutor may respond. Your instructor or tutor may even suggest that you summarize and highlight the journal entries you wish to share during a one-on-one conference with them. In any case, you will be given a heads-up beforehand so you know which entries may be read by someone other than yourself. So think of setting your Dialogue Journal up like this:



*NOTE: If you are left-handed, you may wish to write all your journal entries of the left-hand pages and leave the right-hand pages blank for further dialogue. Choose whatever is most comfortable for you as a writer and remain consistent with it.*

You may be asked to use this Dialogue Journal quite extensively in class, in your Writing Workshop, in the Writing Center, in preparation for your major writing assignments, as you develop plans for revising your major writing assignments, as you consider your writing process and your writing portfolio, and the class and writing group discussions that work with and against and advance or resist your perspective and shift your readings of your own texts and/or the texts others create, and, perhaps, the “texts” we read or watch as fodder for these essays and to encourage reflection on your future writing experiences.

Since you will spend so much time with this Dialogue Journal, I suggest that you get a notebook of some sort just for this purpose and keep it with you and together over the term. Choose one that feels good to you, that makes you want to write in it. You will be asked to write in this at home to prepare for class and for your writing workshop, at the beginning of class and your workshop to prepare for the upcoming discussion, and at the end of the class/workshop to gather your thoughts or ideas for upcoming and/or ongoing writing projects, readings, and revisions. You will be asked to use this journal to explore all aspects of this writing cycle, and you will be asked to bring these reflections and responses into

conversation with those of your future writing self and your classmates' and writing group members' perspectives.

There is only one *rigid rule* about the format of this journal—I want you to use the facing pages in a special way. Examine the Figure above once again. Take all your notes, respond to all questions and prompts for reflection on the right-hand pages unless we specify otherwise (or unless you are left-handed, in which case you will write these things only on the left-hand side of the page). Keep the opposing pages blank for future dialogue. The basic difference is that the right-hand side is for your initial reactions to a discussion, reading, text, experience, (etc). The left-hand pages are for you to reflect upon that reaction, react to that reaction, synthesize it, converse with it. The left-hand pages are for you and others to reflect upon your reaction, react to it, synthesize it, and converse with it. Again, keep that left hand page open (Unless you are left-handed, in which case you may wish to reverse it.). Keep the difference clear and make use of it—don't write continuously from front to back of the sheet.

As we've said, *Talking Back* (one of your textbooks), your instructor, and your tutor will likely offer specific several options for responding in your Dialogue Journal. As always, everything we do is directly related to the development and revision of your major papers for your final portfolio and the development of your final reflections.

What else will we be doing with it? Plenty. You will, of course, use your Dialogue Journal to reflect on, rethink, write badly, rethink and reflect some more, talk back, talk to, and otherwise develop fodder for productive discussion about writing and yourself as a writer. All of these activities will not only help you develop a meta-cognitive awareness that should sustain you as you explore future writing projects, but it will be beneficial in a more tangible sense as you use these pages to explore and develop ideas and prose that will then function as early drafts and prewriting for your major writing assignments, especially the crucial one that you will be including with your writing portfolio at the end of the term. We will speak about that more very soon.

Your instructor and tutor may use it in a number of other ways as well. Let me just share a few:

### *Presenting the Journal*

You will be “dialoging” with yourself, your classmates, your tutor, and your instructor at several points during the semester. I like to ask my students to respond to what is going on in the Dialogue Journal in a more cumulative way as well. At least once during the semester, we will have individual conferences for fifteen or twenty minutes. You may meet with your instructor. You may meet with your tutor. In some cases, you will meet with both. You'll summarize for your tutor and/or your instructor the high points of your journal and interpret yourself as interpreter. Your tutor and/or instructor will probably ask you some hard questions about your responses and name for you what she sees in your summary. At the end of the term, you may be expected to prepare a final series of reflections on these reflections which will then serve as either a talking point in a second conference or (possible “and”) a major writing assignment which you will include in your writing portfolio for the class.

In other words, you will be expected to prepare for the conferences by reviewing your Dialogue Journal, selecting especially significant parts to read to your tutor and/or your instructor, summarizing and interpreting your work as to show us what you've made of yourself and your plans as a writer.

Why conferencing rather than reading the journal page-per-page? The conferences and particularly the final conference and/or final written reflections are the occasions where students are offered the chance to “perform” the habits of reflection and meta-cognition we've been focusing on all term. If we simply read the journals, we would not have that intervening interpretation. The selections and emphases for our comments would be the reader's instead of the writer's. In practice, the student's preparation for these conferences becomes a more and more integral part of the journal. If the left-hand pages are reflections on the right pages, the conferences are reflections on reflections, and those successive acts of transcendence affect the ways in which the writer returns to the journal for future writing.

created by Dr. [Shannon Carter](#), Texas A&M-Commerce ([shannon\\_carter@tamuc.edu](mailto:shannon_carter@tamuc.edu)) for use in any course in our [FYC](#) or [BW](#) Programs

