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## Academic Conversation Templates:

### How to Indicate When a Source is Speaking and Declare Your Position

*This handout aims to provide user-friendly templates based on the book, They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. These templates help writers summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of their sources, and help writers agree, disagree, or both agree and disagree with sources to declare their position relative to the views they've summarized or quoted. Thus, this handout contains two sections: (1) *They Say*, which addresses how to discuss what your sources are saying, and (2) *I Say*, which addresses how to declare your position in relation to the sources.*

#### THEY SAY: Discussing what the sources are saying

**Academic writing, broadly speaking, is argumentative writing. To argue well, writers need to know the conversation that has taken place on their topic. For example, if a politician is to propose a new law, the politician needs to know whether his idea has ever been suggested before and whether people would support or oppose the new law and why they support or oppose the new law. In writing, writers do the same thing. They give background on their topic to show their knowledge of the ongoing conversation and use the conversation to argue their points.**

#### VERB TENSE & SOURCES

- **APA:** In APA, when you discuss cited sources, you are required to use PAST TENSE (e.g., Smith **argued**) or PRESENT PERFECT TENSE (e.g., Smith [and Jones] **has [have] argued**). See pg. 33 in *the APA Manual* for more information.
- **MLA:** Generally, in MLA, when you discuss cited sources, use PRESENT TENSE (e.g. Smith **believes**). PRESENT PERFECT TENSE can also be used, but definitively there are no rules for verb tense and sources in the MLA Handbook.

#### Introducing an Ongoing Debate

- When it comes to the topic of \_\_\_\_\_, most of us will readily agree that \_\_\_\_\_. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of \_\_\_\_\_. Whereas some are convinced that \_\_\_\_\_, others maintain that \_\_\_\_\_.
- In discussion of X, one controversial issue has been \_\_\_\_\_. On the one hand, \_\_\_\_\_ argues \_\_\_\_\_. On the other hand, \_\_\_\_\_ contends \_\_\_\_\_. Others even maintain \_\_\_\_\_. My own view is \_\_\_\_\_.

### Introducing Quotations and Summaries

- She demonstrates that \_\_\_\_\_.
- In fact, they celebrate the fact that \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_, he admits.
- He states \_\_\_\_\_.

### Verbs for Introducing Summaries and Quotations

#### Verbs for Making a Claim

Argue	Insist
Assert	Observe
Believe	Remind us
Claim	Report
Emphasize	Suggest

#### Verbs for Expressing Agreement

Acknowledge	Endorse
Admire	Extol
Agree	Praise
Celebrate the fact that	Reaffirm
Corroborate	Support
Do not deny	Verify

#### Verbs for Questioning or Disagreeing

Complain	Question
Complicate	Refute
Contend	Reject
Contradict	Renounce
Deny	Repudiate
Deplore the tendency to	
Disavow	

#### Verbs for Making Recommendations

Advocate	Implore
Call for	Plead
Demand	Recommend
Encourage	Urge
Exhort	Warn

### *Frame Every Quote*

Since quotations do not speak for themselves, you need to build a frame around them in which you do that speaking for them. You need to make a 'quotation sandwich' [*Introduction-quotation-explanation*]. Introduce the quotation adequately by explaining who is speaking and setting up what the quotation says. Then follow up with explaining why you consider the quotation important and what you take it to say. [The () represents the placement of your in-text citation.]

### For introducing quotations

- X states " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- As the prominent X put it, " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- According to X " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- X himself writes, " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- In her book, \_\_\_\_\_, X maintains that " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- Writing in the journal \_\_\_\_\_, X complains that " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- In X's view, " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- X agrees when she writes, " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- X disagrees when he writes, " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().
- X complicates matters further when she writes, " \_\_\_\_\_ " ().

### For explaining quotations

- Basically, X is saying \_\_\_\_\_.
- In other words, X believes \_\_\_\_\_.
- In making this comment, X argues that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X is insisting that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's point is that \_\_\_\_\_.
- The essence of X's argument is that \_\_\_\_\_.

### Templates for Introducing Something Implied or Assumed

Summarizing a point that is not directly stated by the source(s) but implied or assumed.

- One implication of X's treatment of \_\_\_\_\_ is that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Although X does not say so directly, she apparently assumes that \_\_\_\_\_.
- While scientists rarely admit X, \_\_\_\_\_ often take for granted that \_\_\_\_\_.

**DO NOT** introduce quotations by saying something like "X asserts an idea that" or "A quote by X says." Introductory phrases like these are both redundant and misleading.

I SAY: declaring your position in relation to the sources
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**Experienced writers know how to express their thoughts. Since academic writing, broadly speaking, is argumentative, college writers need to argue well. Thus, writers need to be able to assert their own ideas as well as enter the ongoing conversation (they say) on a topic and use the ideas of others as a launching pad for furthering their ideas. Many times the use of "I" is appropriate. Check with your instructor if unsure of using "I" in your paper.**

### Disagreeing, with Reasons

- I think X is mistaken because she overlooks \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's claim that \_\_\_\_\_ rests upon the questionable assumption that \_\_\_\_\_.
- I disagree with X's view that \_\_\_\_\_ because, as recent research has shown, \_\_\_\_\_.
- X contradicts himself/can't have it both ways. On the one hand, he argues \_\_\_\_\_. But on the other hand, he also says \_\_\_\_\_.
- By focusing on \_\_\_\_\_, X overlooks the deeper problem of \_\_\_\_\_.
- X claims \_\_\_\_\_, but we don't need him to tell us that. Anyone familiar with \_\_\_\_\_ has long known that \_\_\_\_\_.

### Agreeing

- I agree that \_\_\_\_\_ because my experience \_\_\_\_\_ confirms it.
- X is surely right about \_\_\_\_\_ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's theory of \_\_\_\_\_ is extremely useful because it shed insight on the difficult problem of \_\_\_\_\_.
- I agree that \_\_\_\_\_, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe \_\_\_\_\_.
- Those unfamiliar with this school of thought may be interested to know that it basically boils down to \_\_\_\_\_.

### Agreeing and Disagreeing Simultaneously

- Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Although I disagree with much that X says, I fully endorse his final conclusion that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Though I concede that \_\_\_\_\_, I still insist that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X is right that \_\_\_\_\_, but she seems on more dubious ground when she claims that \_\_\_\_\_.
- While X is probably wrong when she claims that \_\_\_\_\_, she is right that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Whereas X provides ample evidence that \_\_\_\_\_, Y and Z's research on \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ convinces me that \_\_\_\_\_ instead.
- I'm of two minds about X's claims that \_\_\_\_\_. On the one hand, I agree that \_\_\_\_\_. On the other hand, I'm not sure if \_\_\_\_\_.
- My feelings on the issue are mixed. I do support X's position that \_\_\_\_\_, but I find Y's arguments about \_\_\_\_\_ and Z's research on \_\_\_\_\_ to be equally persuasive.

### Signaling who is Saying What in Your Own Writing

"I" can be used in well-grounded and well supported arguments just as those that don't use "I". Some occasions may warrant avoiding first person ("I"). Overuse of "I" can also result in a monotonous series of "I" statements—"I believe, I think, I argue". It is a good idea to mix first-person assertions with assertions that signal your position without using "I".

- X argues \_\_\_\_\_.
- According to both X and Y \_\_\_\_\_.
- Politicians, X argues, should \_\_\_\_\_.
- Most athletes will tell you that \_\_\_\_\_.
- My own view, however, is that \_\_\_\_\_.
- I agree, as X may not realize, that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X is right that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's assertion that \_\_\_\_\_ does not fit the facts.
- Anyone familiar with \_\_\_\_\_ should agree that \_\_\_\_\_.
- But \_\_\_\_\_ are real, and are arguably the most significant factor in \_\_\_\_\_.

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- X is right that \_\_\_\_\_.
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- Anyone familiar with \_\_\_\_\_ should agree that \_\_\_\_\_.
- But \_\_\_\_\_ are real, and are arguably the most significant factor in \_\_\_\_\_.

### Indicate Multiple Perspectives—"I" versus "They" [p.70]

Point-of-view clues in the text that clearly separates the views of the writer ("I") from those of source authors ("they").

- X overlooks what I consider an important point about \_\_\_\_\_.
- My own view is that what X insists is a \_\_\_\_\_ is in fact a \_\_\_\_\_.
- I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls \_\_\_\_\_.
- These conclusions, which X discusses in \_\_\_\_\_, add weight to the argument that \_\_\_\_\_.

### Entertaining Objections

Notice that the following examples are not attributed to any specific person or group, but to “skeptics,” “readers,” or “many”. This kind of nameless, faceless naysayer is appropriate in some cases.

- Yet some readers may challenge my view that \_\_\_\_\_. After all, may believe that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Indeed, my own argument that \_\_\_\_\_ seems to ignore \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that \_\_\_\_\_.

### Naming Your Naysayers

The underlined words can be interchanged with another specific group.

- Here many feminists would probably object that \_\_\_\_\_.
- But social Darwinists would certainly taken issue with the argument that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Biologists, of course, may want to dispute my claim that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Nevertheless, both followers and critics of Malcolm X will probably suggest otherwise and argue that \_\_\_\_\_.

### To minimize stereotyping...

- Although not all Christians think alike, some of them will probably dispute my claim that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Non-native English speakers are so diverse in their views that it’s hard to generalize about them, but some are likely to object on the grounds that \_\_\_\_\_.

### Making Concessions While Still Standing Your Ground

- Although I grant that \_\_\_\_\_, I still maintain that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Proponents of X are right to argue that \_\_\_\_\_. But they exaggerate when they claim that \_\_\_\_\_.
- While it is true that \_\_\_\_\_, it does not necessarily follow that \_\_\_\_\_.
- On the one hand, I agree with X that \_\_\_\_\_. But on the other hand, I still insist that \_\_\_\_\_.

### Indicating Who Cares

Underlined words can be replaced with other groups or references to certain people.

- \_\_\_\_\_ used to think \_\_\_\_\_. But recently [or within the past few decades], \_\_\_\_\_ suggests that \_\_\_\_\_.
- This interpretation challenges the work of those critics who have long assumed that \_\_\_\_\_.
- These finding challenge the work of earlier researchers, who tended to assume that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Recent studies like these shed new light on \_\_\_\_\_, which previous studies had not addressed.
- These findings challenge dieters’ common assumption that \_\_\_\_\_.
- At first glance, teenagers might say \_\_\_\_\_. But on closer inspection.

### Why Your Claim Matters

- X matters/is important because \_\_\_\_\_.
- Although X might seem trivial, it is in fact crucial in terms of today’s concern over \_\_\_\_\_.
- Ultimately, what is at stake here is \_\_\_\_\_.
- These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of \_\_\_\_\_.
- My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of \_\_\_\_\_.
- These conclusions/This discovery will have significant applications in \_\_\_\_\_ as well as in \_\_\_\_\_.

### So What and Who Cares

- Although X may seem of concern to only a small group of \_\_\_\_\_, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about \_\_\_\_\_.

### Page References for *They Say, I Say*

- Pages 1-47 contain “They Say” templates and explanations
- Pages 51-97 contain “I Say” templates and explanations
- Pages 101-135 contain “Tying it All Together” templates and explanations
- Pages 163-176 contain the Index of Templates use in the book

### Additional Resources

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001. Print.

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. Print.

Modern Language Association of America, The. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

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Created by Keva Sherven for the UWC—April 2010

Most of the examples are taken directly from *They Say, I Say* by Graff & Birkenstein

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