

In their book, *They Say, I Say* (2010/2017), Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein encourage novice academic writers to make use of templates to frame their arguments. They argue that experienced academic writers make two central rhetorical “moves.” First, writers summarize what *others* have said (“they say”); then they pose their *own* argument in response to what others say (“I say”). Arguments either agree, agree with a difference, or disagree with other arguments. Also stressed in the book is the importance of acknowledging the other side of the argument (objectors or naysayers). In this handout, which reproduces some of Graff and Birkenstein’s templates, X, Y, and Z stand in for authors’ names. As you will see, their language is informal, specific, and personal, so we suggest you adapt their demonstrations of rhetorical moves to suit your purpose.

Describing an article or book you’ve read (introducing what “they say”)

- A number of ____ have recently suggested that ____.
- It has become common today to dismiss _____.
- In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of ____ for _____.

Introducing standard views

- The standard way of thinking about topic X has it that _____.
- It is often said that _____.
- Many people assume that _____.

Introducing an ongoing debate

- In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been _____. On the one hand, _____ argues _____. On the other hand, _____ contends _____. Others even maintain _____. My own view is _____.

Using verbs that capture authorial action

- X acknowledges / argues / believes/ denies / does not deny / claims / complains / concedes / demonstrates / emphasizes / insists / observes / reminds us / suggests that

Introducing quotations

- X states, “_____.”
- As the prominent philosopher X puts it, “_____.”
- According to X, “_____.”
- In her book, _____, X maintains that “_____.”
- In X’s view, “_____.”
- X disagrees when he writes, “_____.”

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The above templates are from or adapted from *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein, 3rd edition, pp. 293-303, published 2017 by W.W. Norton Company, New York, New York. Reproduced/ adapted by Madeline Walker, 2019, The CAC, University of Victoria. This copy is made solely for the use by a student, staff, or faculty member for private study. Any other use may be an infringement of copyright if done without securing the permission of the copyright owner.

Explaining quotations

- In other words, X believes _____.
- In making this comment, X urges us to _____.
- X's point is that _____.
- The essence of X's argument is that _____.

Signaling who is saying what

- X argues _____.
- According to both X and Y, _____.
- Politicians _____, X argues, should _____.
- My own view, however, is that _____.
- Indeed, it is highly likely that _____.

Disagreeing with reasons ("I say")

- I think X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.
- X's claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____.
- By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of _____.

Agreeing with a difference ("I say")

- I agree that _____ because my experience _____ confirms it.
- X surely is right about _____ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that _____.
- X's theory of _____ is extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problem of _____.

Agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously ("I say")

- Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall 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 _____.

Acknowledging the naysayers

- Yet some readers may challenge the view that _____.
- Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that _____.

Describing why your research is important

- X matters / is important because _____.
- These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of _____.
- These conclusions / This discovery will have significant applications in _____ as well as _____.

For more information, see the book *They Say, I Say* available in the McPherson library on reserve and at the bookstore.