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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

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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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*. 5th 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*. 7th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

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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