

SOME “THEY SAY/ I SAY” TEMPLATES FOR ARGUMENTATION

In *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein claim that “Academic writing in particular calls upon writers not simply to express their own ideas, but to do so as a response to what others have said” (ix). In other words, think of your argument in terms of what the authorities or conventional wisdom maintains about a given topic (*They say*) and how what *you* think differs or diverges (*I say*).

Here are some templates to get you started on incorporating and integrating these two parts.

Introducing “standard views”

1. Americans today tend to believe that _____.
2. The standard way of thinking about topic X has it that _____.
3. Many people assume that _____.

Introducing something implied or assumed

1. One implication of X’s treatment of _____ is that _____.
2. Although X does not say so directly/explicitly, she apparently assumes that _____.

Disagreeing, with reasons

1. I think X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.
2. X’s claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____.
3. I disagree with X’s view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.

Establishing why your claims matter

1. Although X seems trivial, it is in fact crucial in terms of today’s concern over _____.
2. Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____.
3. My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of _____.
4. Although X may seem of concern to only a small group of _____, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about _____.

Entertaining objections

1. Of course, many will probably disagree with this claim that _____. (Note: When possible, try to provide more information about whom “many” refers to. Does it refer to many people in general? Most Westerners? Most men? Many white people? Many feminists? Most bourgeois apologists?)
2. Yet is it always true that _____? Is it always the case, as I have been suggesting, that _____?
3. Some readers might challenge my view that _____. After all, many believe that _____. Indeed, my own argument that _____ seems to ignore _____ and _____.

Making concessions while still standing your ground

1. Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that _____.
2. Although I disagree with much of what X says, I fully endorse his final conclusion that _____.
3. X is right that _____, but she seems to be on more dubious ground when she claims that _____.
4. Whereas X provides ample evidence that _____, Y and Z’s research on _____ and _____ convinces me that _____ instead.
5. Proponents of X are right to argue that _____. But they exaggerate when they claim that _____.
6. While it is true that _____, it does not necessarily follow that _____.