

They Say, I Say by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein

Graff and Birkenstein explain that “[o]ne virtue of ... templates ... is that they focus writers’ attention not just on what is being said, but on the *forms* that structure what is being said. In other words, they make students more conscious of the rhetorical patterns that are key to academic success but often pass under the classroom radar” (xix).

They discuss some students needing examples to utilize while developing their own writing style: “Our templates ... have a generative quality, prompting students to make moves in their writing that they might not otherwise make or even know they should make. The templates ... can be particularly helpful for students who are unsure about what to say, or who have trouble finding enough to say, often because they consider their own beliefs so self-evident that they need not be argued for” (xxi).

Graff and Birkenstein provide templates that help students “make seemingly counterintuitive move[s] of questioning their own beliefs, of looking at them from the perspective of those who disagree” (xxi).

Graff and Birkenstein reintroduce “I” into the literary equation: “Rather than prohibit ‘I,’ ... we think a better tactic is to give students practice at using it well and learning its use, both by supporting their claims with evidence and by attending closely to alternative perspectives—to what ‘they’ are saying” (xxiv).

They Say, I Say does not “cover logical principles of argument such as syllogisms, warrants, logical fallacies, or the differences between inductive and deductive reasoning” (xxv).

They Say, I Say provides inexperienced writers with the base of knowledge utilized by more experienced writers: “Often without consciously realizing it, accomplished writers routinely rely on a stock of established moves that are crucial for communicating sophisticated ideas. What makes writers masters of their trade is not only their ability to express interesting thoughts but their mastery of an inventory of basic moves that they probably picked up by reading a wide range of other accomplished writers” (1).

They Say, I Say:

1. Breaks away from the five paragraph essay form
2. Explains how to use the method without plagiarism
3. Discusses how to summarize what “they” say and then react (what “I” say)
4. Addresses the importance of impartiality and objectivity in writing
5. Explores how to evaluate and different methods of incorporating/framing quotations
6. Describes how to maintain the student’s voice
7. Situates the importance of incorporating, or at least acknowledging, counterarguments
8. Expresses how to answer the “so what?” along with the “who cares?”
9. Extrapolates on the importance of transitions
10. Looks at method of revision
11. Reports on how to write in the Sciences and Social Sciences

The book provides templates for the following:

- Introducing what “they say,” p. 23
- Introducing “standard views,” p. 23-24
- Making what “they say” something *you* say, pp. 24-25
- Introducing something implied or assumed, p. 25
- Introducing an ongoing debate, pp. 25-28
- Capturing authorial action, pp. 38-40
- Introducing quotations, p. 46
- Explaining quotations, pp. 46-47
- Disagreeing, with reasons, p. 60
- Agreeing – with a difference, pp. 61-64
- Agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously, pp. 64-66
- Signaling who is saying what, pp. 71-73
- Embedding voice markers, pp. 74-75
- Entertaining objections, p. 82
- Naming your naysayers, pp. 83-84
- Introducing objections informally, pp. 84-85
- Making concessions while still standing your ground, p. 89
- Indicating who cares, pp. 95-96
- Establishing why your claims matter, pp. 98-99
- Commonly used transitions, pp. 108-110
- Adding metacommentary, pp. 131-37
- Starting with what others say about a literary work, pp. 185-88
- Responding to other interpretations of a literary work, p. 191
- Showing evidence when writing about literary work, pp. 194-96

Template examples:

- In discussion of _____, a controversial issue is whether _____. While some argue that _____, others contend that _____.
- This is not to say that _____.
- Of course some might object that _____. Although I concede that _____, I still maintain that _____.
- Author X contradicts herself. At the same time that she argues _____, she also implies _____.
- In recent discussions of _____, a controversial issue has been whether _____. On the one hand, some argue that _____. From this perspective, _____. On the other hand, however, others argue that _____. In the words of _____, one of this view’s main proponents, “_____.” According to this view, _____. In sum, then, the issue is whether _____ or _____.
My own view is that _____. Though I concede that _____, I still maintain that _____. For example, _____. Although some might object that _____, I would reply that _____. The issue is important because _____.