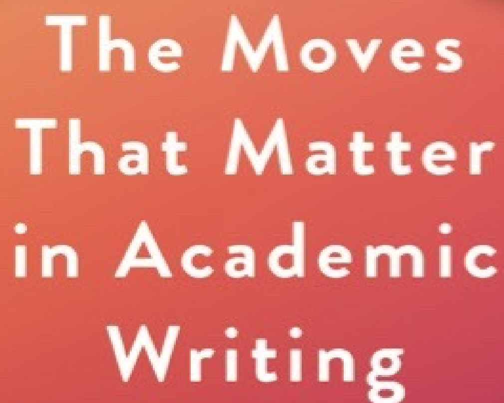

Gerald Graff • Cathy Birkenstein

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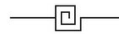
SIXTH EDITION

“THEY SAY / I SAY”

SIXTH EDITION

"THEY SAY / I SAY"

The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing



GERALD GRAFF

CATHY BIRKENSTEIN

both of the University of Illinois at Chicago

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For Aaron David

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PREFACE TO THE SIXTH EDITION

* * *

SINCE ITS INCEPTION, this book has been animated by several interlocking goals:

- To demystify academic argument by showing that it involves one central move: that of stating one's own view (what "I say") not in isolation, but in conversation or debate with the views of others (what "they say").
- To provide flexible, user-friendly templates—"Although it is often said that ___________, I argue ___________," for instance—that help students put this "they say / I say" move into practice, showing that such formulas need not result in writing that is "formulaic."
- To show how important the "they say / I say" move is to a healthy democracy, which requires that we step outside our increasingly polarized comfort zones and listen carefully to those who see things differently.
- To show that, despite the many differences between the academic disciplines, the "they say / I say" move is central to them all, as well as high order workplace and public sphere communication.
- To refute the common perception that academic writing must be dry, lifeless, and devoid of personality, by showing that it can often accommodate different dialects, colloquial expressions, and personal voices.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS EDITION

"In My Experience": Using Personal Stories to Energize Your Argument—one of the two chapters new to this edition—advances this last goal by encouraging students to draw on their personal experiences. Written for students who feel, as an undergraduate once told us, that academic writing "just isn't me," the chapter shows how personal stories can be used in such writing to make virtually any of the moves we cover in this book, including summarizing and challenging what "they say," revising what you "used to think," planting a naysayer, and answering the "so what?" question. Personal stories, we show, can be a great way to connect the academic world to our lives outside the classroom. They can also help students demonstrate that the essay they have submitted was written by a real human being and not artificial intelligence.

"Help Me Understand . . .": When Your "They Say" Is a Bot. Speaking of generative AI, the second new chapter addresses how today's hyper-advanced chatbots can be used not as substitutes for students' own writing skills but as tools for advancing them. When used responsibly, we show, these new chatbots can be deployed in the service of "they say / I say"

argument, and we provide templates for prompting these technologies to help us understand our own positions and those of others, to identify naysayers, to address the ever-important "so what?" and "who cares?" questions, and to make a host of other moves that matter in academic writing.

New and updated examples. In most of the core chapters of the book, we have replaced the examples used to illustrate the rhetorical moves with more recent writing from a wide range of academic and popular sources and a range of authors, from established writers such as Michelle Alexander, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Suketu Mehta, Maya Phillips, and Kenneth Goldsmith to emerging voices such as Damond Williams, Joe Garcia, and students like Yael Lenga and Felicity Noahubi.

New readings. We have also included three new full-length selections that model the rhetorical moves and are documented in MLA and APA style: "Go Ahead, Waste Time on the Internet" by Kenneth Goldsmith, "Disability in Higher Education: Building Access and Building Futures" by Yael Lenga, and "Left Behind" by Joe Garcia, a powerful argument advocating that people who are incarcerated should be granted access to the internet.

New appendix, "Citing What 'They Say'." This appendix offers a quick-start guide to documenting sources, including examples of how to cite generative AI, and points students to where they can find additional models and advice.

A reading experience that is more hands-on than ever with the new Norton Illumine Ebook. Students don't just read *"They Say / I Say"*—they interact with it. Building on the book's already popular templates, exercises, and tutorials, the new Norton Illumine Ebook gets students practicing the moves while they read, through interactive new features written by author Laura J. Panning Davies. Each chapter offers "Check Your Understanding" questions that are auto-graded with immediate feedback. And instructors can easily embed their own notes, videos, or links to share with their students, customizing each chapter as they see fit.

A collection of new videos. The Sixth Edition offers a new collection of animated videos on key concepts—from understanding academic argument to using signal phrases—that help students visualize and apply the book's advice. Each video is two to three minutes long. Some videos are embedded directly in the ebook, and all are available for streaming online.

Tutorials give students hands-on practice using the rhetorical moves taught in the book. Each tutorial helps students analyze an essay with an eye to the "moves that matter" and then use the book's templates to begin writing themselves. The Sixth Edition is updated with a new tutorial for Chapter 7, "In My Experience," as well as new essay examples.

InQuizitive for Writers assignments allow students to practice new writing, editing, and research skills in a low-stakes, feedback-driven environment. Interactive questions are adaptive, so students receive additional practice in the areas where they need more help, and explanatory feedback offers advice precisely when it's needed, along with direct links to*The Little Seagull Handbook* ebook, which is automatically included with all new copies of *"They Say / I Say."*New activities cover rhetorical situations, elements of argument, thesis statements, critical reading strategies, and more.

Norton Teaching Tools is a new, searchable website that can be filtered by chapter or by resource type, making it easy to find exactly what you need, download, customize, and import it into your LMS course. Written by new co-author Laura J. Panning Davies, with special contributions from instructors across the country, all of the revised contents from the instructor's guide for *"They Say / I Say"* can now be found here: summaries of the rhetoric chapters and each of the essays; in-class activities, discussion prompts, and assignment suggestions for each chapter; advice and assignment ideas for using theysayiblog.com; teaching notes, lists of related essays, and suggested responses to the "Joining the Conversation" questions; and sample syllabi. New to the Sixth Edition is a comprehensive guide to teaching first-year writing that covers everything from designing a course to assessing student writing to engaging difficult conversations in the classroom. You will also find tips and best practices for assigning Check Your Understanding questions in the Norton Illumine Ebook, InQuizitive for Writers, *The Little Seagull Handbook* ebook, the new collection of animated videos, and other digital resources.

"They Say / I Blog" provides current readings that use the rhetorical moves covered in the book, along with questions that prompt students to join the conversation online. Updated monthly by author Laura J. Panning Davies, the blog offers a rich archive of additional readings on important issues. Visit **theysayiblog.com**.

Resources for your learning management system (LMS) files provide integrated links to all of Norton's high-quality digital resources. All activities can be accessed from within your existing learning management system, and graded activities can be configured to report to the LMS course gradebook.

Even as we have updated *"They Say / I Say,"* our basic goals remain unchanged: to help students engage closely with others, particularly those who challenge what we say. Our additions, in other words, are meant to reinforce our longstanding goal of demystifying academic discourse by identifying its key moves in forms that students can put into practice. Given the deeply divided society we continue to live in, this practice of engaging in dialogue and entertaining counterarguments seems more urgent than ever.

PREFACE

Demystifying Academic Conversation

* * *

EXPERIENCED WRITING INSTRUCTORS have long recognized that writing well means entering into conversation with others. Academic writing in particular calls on writers not simply to express their own ideas but to do so as a response to what others have said. The first-year writing program at our own university, according to its mission statement, asks "students to participate in ongoing conversations about vitally important academic and public issues." A similar statement by another program holds that "intellectual writing is almost always composed in response to others' texts." These statements echo the ideas of many recent rhetorical theorists, who argue that writing well means engaging the voices of others and letting them in turn engage us.

Yet despite this growing consensus that writing is a social, conversational act, helping student writers actually participate in these conversations remains a formidable challenge. This book aims to meet that challenge. Its goal is to demystify academic writing by isolating its basic moves, explaining them clearly, and representing them in the form of templates. In this way, we hope to help students become active participants in the important conversations of the academic world and the wider public sphere.

HIGHLIGHTS

- *Shows that writing well means entering a conversation,* summarizing others ("they say") to set up one's own argument ("I say")
- *Demystifies academic writing,* showing students "the moves that matter" in language they can readily apply
- *Provides user-friendly templates* to help writers make those moves in their own writing
- *Includes a chapter on reading,* showing students how the authors they read are part of a conversation that they themselves can enter—and thus to see reading as a matter not of passively absorbing information but of understanding and actively entering dialogues and debates

HOW THIS BOOK CAME TO BE

The original idea for this book grew out of our shared interest in democratizing academic culture. First, it grew out of arguments that Gerald Graff has been making throughout his career that schools and colleges need to invite students into the conversations and debates that surround them. More specifically, it is a practical, hands-on companion to his book *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*, in which he looks at academic conversations from the perspective of those who find them mysterious and proposes ways in which such mystification can be overcome. Second, this book grew out of writing templates that Cathy Birkenstein developed in the 1990s, for use in writing and literature courses she was teaching. Many students, she found, could readily grasp what it meant to support a thesis with evidence, to entertain a counterargument, to identify a textual contradiction, and ultimately to summarize and respond to challenging arguments, but they often had trouble putting these concepts into practice in their own writing. When Cathy sketched out templates on the board, however, giving her students some of the language and patterns that these sophisticated moves require, their writing—and even their quality of thought—significantly improved.

This book began, then, when we put our ideas together and realized that these templates might have the potential to open up and clarify academic conversation. We proceeded from the premise that all writers rely on certain stock formulas that they themselves didn't invent—and that many of these formulas are so commonly used that they can be represented in model templates that students can use to structure and even generate what they want to say.

As we developed a working draft of this book, we began using it in first-year writing courses that we teach at UIC. In classroom exercises and writing assignments, we found that students who otherwise struggled to organize their thoughts, or even to think of something to say, did much better when we provided them with templates like the following:

- **In discussions of __________, a controversial issue is whether __________. While some argue that __________, others contend that __________.**
- **This is not to say that __________.**

One virtue of such templates, we found, is that they focus writers' attention not just on what is being said but also 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.

THE CENTRALITY OF "THEY SAY / I SAY"

The central rhetorical move that we focus on in this book is the “they say / I say” template that gives our book its title. In our view, this template represents the deep, underlying structure, the internal DNA as it were, of all effective arguments. Effective persuasive writers do more than make well-supported claims (“I say”); they also map those claims relative to the claims of others (“they say”).

Here, for example, the “they say / I say” pattern structures a passage from an essay by the media and technology critic Steven Johnson:

> For decades, we’ve worked under the assumption that mass culture follows a path declining steadily toward lowest-common-denominator standards, presumably because the “masses” want dumb, simple pleasures and big media companies try to give the masses what they want. But . . . the exact opposite is happening: the culture is getting more cognitively demanding, not less.

STEVEN JOHNSON, “Watching TV Makes You Smarter”

In generating his own argument from something “they say,” Johnson suggests *why* he needs to say what he is saying: to correct a popular misconception.

Even when writers do not explicitly identify the views they are responding to, as Johnson does, an implicit “they say” can often be discerned, as in the following passage by Zora Neale Hurston:

> I remember the day I became colored.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”

In order to grasp Hurston’s point here, we need to be able to reconstruct the implicit view she is responding to and questioning: that racial identity is an innate quality we are simply born with. On the contrary, Hurston suggests, our race is imposed on us by society—something we “become” by virtue of how we are treated.

As these examples suggest, the “they say / I say” model can improve not just student writing but student reading comprehension as well. Since reading and writing are deeply reciprocal activities, students who learn to make the rhetorical moves represented by the templates in this book figure to become more adept at identifying these same moves in the texts they read. And if we are right that effective arguments are always in dialogue with other arguments, then it follows that in order to understand the types of challenging texts assigned in college, students need to identify the views to which those texts are responding.

Working with the “they say / I say” model can also help with invention, finding something to say. In our experience, students best discover what they want to say not by thinking about a subject in an isolation booth but by reading texts, listening closely to what other writers say, and looking for an opening through which they can enter the conversation. In other words, listening closely to others and summarizing what they have to say can help writers generate their own ideas.

THE USEFULNESS OF TEMPLATES

Our templates also 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 in this book 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. Students like this are often helped, we've found, when we give them a simple template like the following one for entertaining a counterargument (or planting a naysayer, as we call it in Chapter 6):

- **Of course some might object that __________. Although I concede that __________, I still maintain that __________.**

What this particular template helps students do is make the seemingly counterintuitive move of questioning their own beliefs, of looking at them from the perspective of those who disagree. In so doing, templates can bring out aspects of students' thoughts that, as they themselves sometimes remark, they didn't even realize were there.

Other templates in this book help students make a host of sophisticated moves that they might not otherwise make: summarizing what someone else says, framing a quotation in one's own words, indicating the view that the writer is responding to, marking the shift from a source's view to the writer's own view, offering evidence for that view, entertaining and answering counterarguments, and explaining what is at stake in the first place. In showing students how to make such moves, templates do more than organize students' ideas; they help bring those ideas into existence.

"OK—BUT TEMPLATES?"

We are aware, of course, that some instructors may have reservations about templates. Some, for instance, may object that such formulaic devices represent a return to prescriptive forms of instruction that encourage passive learning or lead students to put their writing on automatic pilot.

This is an understandable reaction, we think, to kinds of rote instruction that have indeed encouraged passivity and drained writing of its creativity and dynamic relation to the social world. The trouble is that many students will never learn on their own to make the key intellectual moves that our templates represent. While seasoned writers pick up these moves unconsciously through their reading, many students do not. Consequently, we believe, students need to see these moves represented in the explicit ways that the templates provide.

The aim of the templates, then, is not to stifle critical thinking but to be direct with students about the key rhetorical moves that it comprises. Since we encourage students to modify and adapt the templates to the particularities of the arguments they are making, using such prefabricated formulas as learning tools need not result in writing and thinking that are

themselves formulaic. Admittedly, no teaching tool can guarantee that students will engage in hard, rigorous thought. Our templates do, however, provide concrete prompts that can stimulate and shape such thought: What do "they say" about my topic? How would a naysayer respond to my argument? What is my evidence? Do I need to qualify my point? Who cares?

In fact, templates have a long and rich history. Public orators from ancient Greece and Rome through the European Renaissance studied rhetorical *topoi* or "commonplaces," model passages and formulas that represented the different strategies available to public speakers. In many respects, our templates echo this classical rhetorical tradition of imitating established models.

The journal *Nature* requires aspiring contributors to follow a guideline that is like a template on the opening page of their manuscript: "Two or three sentences explaining what the main result [of their study] reveals in direct comparison with what was thought to be the case previously, or how the main result adds to previous knowledge." In the field of education, a form designed by the education theorist Howard Gardner asks postdoctoral fellowship applicants to complete the following template: "Most scholars in the field believe ___________. As a result of my study, ___________." That these two examples are geared toward postdoctoral fellows and veteran researchers shows that it is not only struggling undergraduates who can use help making these key rhetorical moves but experienced academics as well.

Templates have even been used in the teaching of personal narrative. The literary and educational theorist Jane Tompkins devised the following template to help student writers make the often difficult move from telling a story to explaining what it means: "X tells a story about ___________ to make the point that ___________. My own experience with ___________ yields a point that is similar / different / both similar and different. What I take away from my own experience with ___________ is ___________. As a result, I conclude ___________." We especially like this template because it suggests that "they say / I say" argument need not be mechanical, impersonal, or dry and that telling a story and making an argument are more compatible activities than many think.

WHY IT'S OK TO USE "I"

But wait—doesn't the "I" part of "they say / I say" flagrantly encourage the use of the first-person pronoun? Aren't we aware that some teachers prohibit students from using "I" or "we" on the grounds that these pronouns encourage ill-considered, subjective opinions rather than objective and reasoned arguments? Yes, we are aware of this first-person prohibition, but we think it has serious flaws. First, expressing ill-considered, subjective opinions is not necessarily the worst sin beginning writers can commit; it might be a starting point from which they can move on to more reasoned, less self-indulgent perspectives. Second, prohibiting students from using "I" is simply not an effective way of curbing students' subjectivity, since one can offer poorly argued, ill-supported opinions just as easily without it. Third and most important, prohibiting the first person tends to hamper students' ability not only to take strong positions but also to differentiate their own positions from those of others, as we point out in Chapter 5.

To be sure, writers can resort to various circumlocutions—"it will here be argued," "the evidence suggests," "the truth is"—and these may be useful for avoiding a monotonous series of "I believe" sentences. But except for avoiding such monotony, we see no good reason why "I" should be set aside in persuasive writing. Rather than prohibit "I," then, 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.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

Because of its centrality, we have allowed the "they say / I say" format to dictate the structure of this book. So while Part 1 addresses the art of listening to others, Part 2 addresses how to offer one's own response. Part 1 opens with the chapter "Starting with What Others Are Saying," which explains why it is generally advisable to begin a text by citing others rather than plunging directly into one's own views. Subsequent chapters take up the arts of summarizing and quoting what these others have to say. Part 2 begins with a chapter on different ways of responding, followed by chapters on marking the shift between what "they say" and what "I say," on introducing and answering objections, on using personal stories, and on answering the all-important questions "so what?" and "who cares?" Part 3, "Tying It All Together," includes a chapter on connection and coherence; one on academic language, which encourages students to draw on their everyday voice as a tool for writing; and others on the art of metacommentary and using the templates to revise a text. Part 4 offers guidance for entering conversations in specific academic contexts, with chapters on entering class discussions, writing online, and reading and writing in the social sciences. It also includes a new chapter on how to use and cite chatbots in essays. Finally, we provide forty-three readings and an index of templates.

WHAT THIS BOOK DOESN'T DO

There are some things that this book does not try to do. We do not, for instance, cover logical principles of argument, such as syllogisms, warrants, logical fallacies, or the differences between inductive and deductive reasoning. Although such concepts can be useful, we believe most of us learn the ins and outs of argumentative writing not by studying logical principles in the abstract but by plunging into actual discussions and debates, trying out different patterns of response, and in this way getting a sense of what works to persuade different audiences and what doesn't. In our view, people learn more about arguing from hearing someone say, "You miss my point. What I'm saying is not ___________ but ___________," or "I agree with you that ___________ and would even add that ___________," than they do from studying the differences between inductive and deductive reasoning. Such formulas give students an immediate sense of what it feels like to enter a public conversation in a way that studying abstract warrants and logical fallacies does not.

ENGAGING WITH THE IDEAS OF OTHERS

One central goal of this book is to demystify academic writing by returning it to its social and conversational roots. Although writing may require some degree of quiet and solitude, the "they say / I say" model shows students that they can best develop their arguments not just by looking inward but by doing what they often do in a good conversation with friends and family —listening carefully to what others are saying and engaging with other views.

This approach to writing therefore has an ethical dimension, since it asks writers not simply to keep proving and reasserting what they already believe but also to stretch what they believe by putting it up against beliefs that differ, sometimes radically, from their own. In an increasingly diverse, global society, this ability to engage with the ideas of others is especially crucial to democratic citizenship.

Gerald Graff

Cathy Birkenstein

SIXTH EDITION

"THEY SAY / I SAY"

INTRODUCTION

Entering the Conversation

* * *

THINK ABOUT AN ACTIVITY that you do particularly well: cooking, playing the piano, shooting a basketball, even something as basic as driving a car. If you reflect on this activity, you'll realize that once you mastered it you no longer had to give much conscious thought to the various moves that go into doing it. Performing this activity, in other words, depends on your having learned a series of complicated moves—moves that may seem mysterious or difficult to those who haven't yet learned them.

The same applies to writing. 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 also their mastery of an inventory of basic moves that they probably picked up by reading a wide range of other accomplished writers. Less experienced writers, by contrast, are often unfamiliar with these basic moves and unsure how to make them in their own writing. Hence this book, which is intended as a short, user-friendly guide to the basic moves of academic writing.

One of our key premises is that these basic moves are so common that they can be represented in *templates* that you can use right away to structure and even generate your own writing. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this book is its presentation of many such templates, designed to help you successfully enter not only the world of academic thinking and writing but also the wider worlds of civic discourse and work.

Instead of focusing solely on abstract principles of writing, then, this book offers model templates that help you put those principles directly into practice. Working with these templates will give you an immediate sense of how to engage in the kinds of critical thinking you are required to do at the college level and in the vocational and public spheres beyond.

Some of these templates represent simple but crucial moves, like those used to summarize some widely held belief:

- **Many Americans assume that ___________.**

Others are more complicated:

- **On the one hand, __________. On the other hand, __________.**
- **Author X contradicts herself. At the same time that she argues __________, she also implies __________.**
- **I agree that __________. However, __________.**
- **This is not to say that __________.**

It is true, of course, that critical thinking and writing go deeper than any set of linguistic formulas, requiring that you question assumptions, develop strong claims, offer supporting reasons and evidence, consider opposing arguments, and so on. But these deeper habits of thought cannot be put into practice unless you have a language for expressing them in clear, organized ways.

STATE YOUR OWN IDEAS AS A RESPONSE TO OTHERS

The single most important template that we focus on in this book is the "they say ___________; I say ___________" formula that gives our book its title. If there is any one point that we hope you will take away from this book, it is the importance not only of expressing your ideas ("I say") but also of presenting those ideas as a *response to some other person or group* ("they say"). For us, the underlying structure of effective academic writing—and of responsible public discourse—resides not just in stating our own ideas but in listening closely to others around us, summarizing their views in a way that they will recognize, and responding with our own ideas in kind. Broadly speaking, academic writing is argumentative writing, and we believe that to argue well you need to do more than assert your own position. You need to enter a conversation, using what others say (or might say) as a launching pad or sounding board for your own views. For this reason, one of the main pieces of advice in this book is to write the voices of others into your text.

In our view, then, the best academic writing has one underlying feature: it is deeply engaged in some way with other people's views. Too often, however, academic writing is taught as a process of saying "true" or "smart" things in a vacuum, as if it were possible to argue effectively without being in conversation *with* someone else. If you have been taught to write a traditional five-paragraph essay, for example, you have learned how to develop a thesis and support it with evidence. This is good advice as far as it goes, but it leaves out the important fact that in the real world we don't make arguments without being provoked. Instead, we make arguments because someone has said or done something (or perhaps *not* said or done something) and we need to respond: "I can't see why you like football so much"; "I agree: it was a great film"; "That argument is contradictory." If it weren't for other people and our need to challenge, agree with, or otherwise respond to them, there would be no reason to argue at all.

"WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?"

To make an impact as a writer, then, you need to do more than make statements that are logical, well supported, and consistent. You must also find a way of entering into conversation with the views of others, with something “they say.” The easiest and most common way writers do this is by *summarizing* what others say and then using it to set up what they want to say.

“But why,” as a student of ours once asked, “do I always need to summarize the views of others to set up my own view? Why can’t I just state my own view and be done with it?” Why indeed? After all, “they,” whoever they may be, will have already had their say, so why do you have to *repeat* it? Furthermore, if they had their say in print, can’t readers just go and read what was said themselves?

The answer is that if you don’t identify the “they say” you’re responding to, your own argument probably won’t have a point. Readers will wonder what prompted you to say what you’re saying and therefore motivated you to write. As the figure on the following page suggests, without a “they say,” *what* you are saying may be clear to your audience, but *why* you are saying it won’t be.

Even if we don’t know what film he’s referring to, it’s easy to grasp what the speaker means here when he says that its characters are very complex. But it’s hard to see why the speaker feels the need to say what he is saying. “Why,” as one member of his imagined audience wonders, “is he telling us this?” So the characters are complex—so what?

The speaker has a speech bubble, saying The characters in the film are very complex! The heads of the audience have thought and speech bubbles expressing confusion. They say, Yeah, so? and Why is he telling us this? One member of the audience is sleeping.

Now look at what happens to the same proposition when it is presented as a response to something "they say":

The speaker has a speech bubble, saying, Some say that the characters in the film are sexist stereotypes. In fact, however, the characters in the film are very complex! The audience has thought and speech bubbles expressing comprehension. They say, Hmm... Good point! and Gee, never thoughta that!

We hope you agree that the same claim—"the characters in the film are very complex"—becomes much stronger when presented as a response to a contrary view: that the film's characters "are sexist stereotypes." Unlike the speaker in the first cartoon, the speaker in the second has a clear goal or mission: to correct what he sees as a mistaken characterization.

THE AS-OPPOSED-TO-WHAT FACTOR

To put our point another way, framing your "I say" as a response to something "they say" gives your writing an element of contrast without which it won't make sense. It may be helpful to think of this crucial element as an "as-opposed-to-what factor" and, as you write, to continually ask yourself, "Who says otherwise?" and "Does anyone dispute it?" Behind the audience's "Yeah, so?" and "Why is he telling us this?" in the first cartoon above lie precisely these types of "As opposed to what?" questions. The speaker in the second cartoon, we think, is more satisfying because he answers these questions, helping us see his point that the film presents complex characters *rather than* simple sexist stereotypes.

HOW IT'S DONE

Many accomplished writers make explicit "they say" moves to set up and motivate their own arguments. One famous example is Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which consists almost entirely of King's eloquent responses to a public statement by eight clergymen deploring the civil rights protests he was leading. The letter—which was written in 1963, while King was in prison for leading a demonstration against racial injustice in Birmingham—is structured almost entirely around a framework of summary and response, in which King summarizes and then answers their criticisms. In one typical passage, King writes as follows:

> You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

King goes on to agree with his critics that "it is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham," yet he hastens to add that "it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative." King's letter is so thoroughly conversational, in fact, that it could be rewritten in the form of a dialogue or play.

King's critics:

King's response:

Critics:

Response:

Clearly, King would not have written his famous letter were it not for his critics, whose views he treats not as objections to his already-formed arguments but as the motivating source of those arguments, their central reason for being. He quotes not only what his critics have said ("Some have asked: 'Why didn't you give the new city administration time to act?' "), but also things they *might* have said ("One may well ask: 'How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?' ")—all to set the stage for what he himself wants to say.

The “they” you respond to in crafting an argument need not be a famous author or someone known to your audience. It can be a friend or family member, a classmate who has made a provocative claim, or something a group or individual might say. It can even be a side of yourself: something you partly believe but also doubt, or something you once believed but no longer do, as Michelle Alexander suggests in the introduction to her 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (included in this book):

> I reached the conclusions presented in this book reluctantly. Ten years ago, I would have argued strenuously against the central claim made here—namely, that something akin to a racial caste system currently exists in the United States. Indeed, if Barack Obama had been elected president back then, I would have argued that his election marked the nation’s triumph over racial caste—the final nail in the coffin of Jim Crow. (349)

MICHELLE ALEXANDER, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

In this passage, Alexander identifies a view that she used to hold and that many to this day continue to hold: namely, that the United States is a caste-free, colorblind society that, as Barack Obama’s election illustrates, has finally left Jim Crow–style racism behind. In so doing, Alexander avoids two common temptations: to either bury challenges to her argument, or to acknowledge them but in mocking, dismissive ways. Instead, Alexander writes this counterview into her text—and in a way that does it justice. She then uses the remainder of her book to answer it, arguing that today’s penal system inflicts so much undeserved damage on the Black community that it can only be understood as an extension of Jim Crow–era repression.

See Chapter 4 for more on agreeing, but with a difference.

While King and Alexander both identify the views they are responding to, some authors do not, instead allowing readers to infer what view they’re responding to on their own. See, for instance, if you can identify the implied or unnamed “they say” that the following claim is responding to:

> I like to think I have a certain advantage as a teacher of literature because when I was growing up I disliked and feared books.

GERALD GRAFF, “Disliking Books at an Early Age”

In case you haven’t figured it out already, the phantom “they say” here is the common belief that in order to be a good teacher of literature, one must have grown up liking and enjoying books.

COURT CONTROVERSY, BUT . . .

As you can see from these examples, many writers use the “they say / I say” format to challenge standard ways of thinking and thus to stir up controversy. This point may come as a shock to you if you have always had the impression that in order to succeed academically you need to play it safe and avoid controversy in your writing, making statements that nobody can possibly disagree with. Though this view of writing may appear logical, it is actually a recipe for flat, lifeless writing and for writing that fails to answer what we call the “so what?” and “who cares?” questions. “William Shakespeare wrote many famous plays and sonnets” may be a perfectly true statement, but precisely because nobody is likely to disagree with it, it goes without saying and thus would seem pointless if said.

But just because controversy is important doesn’t mean you have to become an attack dog who automatically disagrees with everything others say. We think this is an important point to underscore because some who are not familiar with this book have gotten the impression from the title that our goal is to train writers simply to disparage whatever “they say.”

LISTEN BEFORE YOU LEAP

There certainly are occasions when strong critique is needed. It’s hard to live in a deeply polarized society like our current one and not feel the need at times to criticize what others think. But even the most justified critiques fall flat, we submit, unless we really listen to and understand the views we are criticizing:

- **While I understand the impulse to __________, my own view is __________.**

Even the most sympathetic audiences, after all, tend to feel manipulated by arguments that scapegoat and caricature the other side.

Furthermore, genuinely listening to views we disagree with can have the salutary effect of helping us see that beliefs we’d initially disdained may not be as thoroughly reprehensible as we’d imagined. Thus the type of “they say / I say” argument that we promote in this book can take the form of agreeing up to a point or of both agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously, as in:

- **While I agree with X that __________, I cannot accept her overall conclusion that __________.**
- **While X argues __________, and I argue __________, in a way we’re both right.**

Agreement cannot be ruled out, however:

- **I agree with __________ that __________.**

THE TEMPLATE OF TEMPLATES

There are many ways, then, to enter a conversation and respond to what “they say.” But our discussion of ways to do so would be incomplete were we not to mention the most comprehensive way that writers enter conversations, which incorporates all the major moves discussed in this book:

- **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 X, 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 __________.

This “template of templates,” as we like to call it, represents the internal DNA of countless articles and even entire books. Writers commonly use a version of it not only to stake out their “they say” and “I say” at the start of their manuscript, but—just as important—to form the overarching blueprint that structures what they write over the entire length of their text.

Taking it line by line, this master template first helps you open your text by identifying an issue in some ongoing conversation or debate (“In recent discussions of __________, a controversial issue has been __________”) and then map some of the voices in this controversy (by using the “on the one hand / on the other hand” structure). The template then helps you introduce a quotation (“In the words of X”) and explain the quotation in your own words (“According to this view”). Then, in a new paragraph, it helps you state your own argument (“My own view is that”), qualify your argument (“Though I concede that”), and support your argument with evidence (“For example”). In addition, the template helps you make one of the most crucial moves in argumentative writing, what we call “planting a naysayer in your text,” in which you summarize and then answer a likely objection to your own central claim (“Although it might be objected that __________, I reply __________”). Finally, this template helps you shift between general, overarching claims (“In sum, then”) and smaller-scale, supporting claims (“For example”).

Again, none of us is born knowing these moves, especially when it comes to academic writing—hence the need for this book.

BUT ISN'T THIS PLAGIARISM?

"But isn't this plagiarism?" at least one student each year will usually ask. "Well, is it?" we respond, turning the question around into one the entire class can profit from. "We are, after all, asking you to use language in your writing that isn't your own—language that you 'borrow' or, to put it less delicately, steal from other writers."

Often, a lively discussion ensues that raises important questions about authorial ownership and helps everyone better understand the frequently confusing line between plagiarism and the legitimate use of what others say and how they say it. Students are quick to see that no one person owns a conventional formula like "on the one hand / on the other hand." Phrases like "a controversial issue" are so commonly used and recycled that they are generic—community property that can be freely used without fear of committing plagiarism. It *is* plagiarism, however, if the words used to fill in the blanks of such formulas are borrowed from others without proper acknowledgment. In sum, then, while it is not plagiarism to recycle conventionally used formulas, it is a serious academic offense to take the substantive content from others' texts without citing the authors and giving them proper credit.

"OK—BUT TEMPLATES?"

Nevertheless, if you are like some of our students, your initial response to templates may be skepticism. At first, many of our students complain that using templates will take away their originality and creativity and make them all sound the same. "They'll turn us into writing robots," one of our students insisted. "I'm in college now," another student asserted. "This is third-grade-level stuff."

In our view, however, the templates in this book, far from being "third-grade-level stuff," represent the stock-in-trade of sophisticated thinking and writing, and they often require a great deal of practice and instruction to use successfully. As for the belief that preestablished forms undermine creativity, we think it rests on a very limited vision of what creativity is all about. In our view, the templates in this book will actually help your writing become *more* original and creative, not less. After all, even the most creative forms of expression depend on established patterns and structures. Most songwriters, for instance, rely on a time-honored verse-chorus-verse pattern, and few people would call Shakespeare uncreative because he didn't invent the sonnet or the dramatic forms that he used to such dazzling effect. Even the most avant-garde, cutting-edge artists like improvisational jazz musicians need to master the basic forms that their work improvises on, departs from, and goes beyond, or else their work will come across as uneducated child's play. Ultimately, then, creativity and originality lie not in the avoidance of established forms but in the imaginative use of them.

Furthermore, these templates do not dictate the *content* of what you say, which can be as original as you can make it, but only suggest a way of formatting *how* you say it. In addition, once you begin to feel comfortable with the templates in this book, you will be able to improvise creatively on them to fit new situations and purposes and find others in your reading. In other words, the templates offered here are learning tools to get you started, not structures

set in stone. Once you get used to using them, you can even dispense with them altogether, for the rhetorical moves they model will be at your fingertips in an unconscious, instinctive way.

But if you still need proof that writing templates need not make you sound stiff and artificial, consider the following opening to an essay by Kelly Coryell that we've included in the book:

> I've never understood the popular saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." I grew up as a tomboy; I've had more than my fair share of scrapes, bruises, and stitches. But I've found that words inflict the most painful injuries.

KELLY CORYELL, "All Words Matter: The Manipulation behind 'All Lives Matter' "

Although Coryell relies on a version of the "they say / I say" formula—they say that words are less harmful than physical wounds, but I say the opposite is the case—her writing is anything but dry, robotic, or uncreative. A few things that add warmth to the passage are Coryell's use of everyday colloquial language (a technique we discuss in Chapter 10) and her inclusion of her own personal experience (a technique we discuss in Chapter 7).

PUTTING IN YOUR OAR

Though the immediate goal of this book is to help you become a better writer, at a deeper level it invites you to become a certain type of person: a critical, intellectual thinker who, instead of sitting passively on the sidelines, can participate in the debates and conversations of your world in an active and empowered way. Ultimately, this book invites you to become a critical thinker who can enter the types of conversations described eloquently by the philosopher Kenneth Burke in the following widely cited passage. Likening the world of intellectual exchange to a never-ending conversation at a party, Burke writes:

> You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you. . . . The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

KENNETH BURKE, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*

What we like about this passage is its suggestion that stating an argument (putting in your oar) can only be done in conversation with others; that entering the dynamic world of ideas must be done not as isolated individuals but as social beings deeply connected to others.

This ability to enter complex, many-sided conversations has taken on a special urgency in today's polarized red state / blue state America, where the future for all of us may depend on

our ability to put ourselves in the shoes of those who think very differently from us. The central piece of advice in this book—that we listen carefully to others, including those who disagree with us, and then engage with them thoughtfully and respectfully—can help us see beyond our own pet beliefs, which may not be shared by everyone. The mere act of crafting a sentence that begins "Of course, someone might object that ___________" may not seem like a way to change the world; but it does have the potential to jog us out of our comfort zones, to get us thinking critically about our own beliefs, and even to change minds, our own included.

Exercises

1. Write two paragraphs in which you first summarize our rationale for the templates in this book and then articulate your own position in response. If you want, you can use the template below to organize your paragraphs, expanding and modifying it as necessary to fit what you want to say:

   In the Introduction to "*They Say / I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein provide templates designed to __________. Specifically, Graff and Birkenstein argue that the types of writing templates they offer __________. As the authors themselves put it, "__________." Although some people believe __________, Graff and Birkenstein insist that __________. In sum, then, their view is that __________.

   I [agree / disagree / have mixed feelings]. In my view, the types of templates that the authors recommend __________. For instance, __________. In addition, __________. Some might object, of course, on the grounds that __________. Yet I would argue that __________. Overall, then, I believe __________—an important point to make given __________.

2. Read the following paragraph from an essay by Emily Poe, written when she was a student at Furman University. Disregarding for the moment what Poe says, focus your attention on the phrases she uses to structure what she says (italicized here). Then write a new paragraph using Poe's as a model but replacing her topic, vegetarianism, with one of your own.

   The term "vegetarian" tends to be synonymous with "tree-hugger" in many people's minds. *They see* vegetarianism as a cult that brainwashes its followers into eliminating an essential part of their daily diets for an abstract goal of "animal welfare." *However*, few vegetarians choose their lifestyle just to follow the crowd. *On the contrary*, many of these supposedly brainwashed people are actually independent thinkers, concerned citizens, and compassionate human beings. *For the truth is* that there are many very good reasons for giving up meat. Perhaps the best reasons are to improve the environment, to encourage humane treatment of livestock, or to enhance one's own health. *In this essay, then*, closely examining a vegetarian diet as compared

to a meat-eater’s diet will show that vegetarianism is clearly the better option for sustaining the Earth and all its inhabitants.

ONE

"THEY SAY"

Starting with What Others Are Saying

* * *

NOT LONG AGO we attended a talk at an academic conference where the speaker's central claim seemed to be that a certain sociologist—call him Dr. X—had done very good work in a number of areas of the discipline. The speaker proceeded to illustrate his thesis by referring extensively and in great detail to various books and articles by Dr. X and by quoting long passages from them. The speaker was obviously both learned and impassioned, but as we listened to his talk, we found ourselves somewhat puzzled: the argument—that Dr. X's work was very important—was clear enough, but why did the speaker need to make it in the first place? Did anyone dispute it? Were there commentators in the field who had argued against X's work or challenged its value? Was the speaker's interpretation of what X had done somehow novel or revolutionary? Since the speaker gave no hint of an answer to any of these questions, we could only wonder why he was going on and on about X. It was only after the speaker finished and took questions from the audience that we got a clue: in response to one questioner, he referred to several critics who had vigorously questioned Dr. X's ideas and convinced many sociologists that Dr. X's work was unsound.

The hypothetical audience in the figure on p. 5 reacts similarly.

This story illustrates an important lesson: that to give writing the most important thing of all—namely, a point—writers need to indicate clearly not only what their thesis is but also what larger conversation that thesis is responding to. Because our speaker failed to mention what others had said about Dr. X's work, he left his audience unsure about why he felt the need to say what he was saying. Perhaps the point was clear to other sociologists in the audience who were more familiar with the debates over Dr. X's work than we were. But even they, we bet, would have understood the speaker's point better if he'd sketched in some of the larger conversation his own claims were a part of and reminded the audience about what "they say."

This story also illustrates an important lesson about the *order* in which things are said: to keep an audience engaged, writers need to explain what they are responding to—either before offering that response or, at least, very early in the discussion. Delaying this explanation for more than one or two paragraphs in a very short essay or blog entry, three or four pages in a longer work, or more than ten or so pages in a book reverses the natural order in which readers process material—and in which writers think and develop ideas. After all, it seems very unlikely that our conference speaker first developed his defense of Dr. X and only later came across Dr. X's critics. As someone knowledgeable in his field, the speaker surely encountered the criticisms first and only then was compelled to respond and, as he saw it, set the record straight.

Therefore, when it comes to constructing an argument (whether orally or in writing), we offer you the following advice: remember that you are entering a conversation and therefore need to start with "what others are saying," as the title of this chapter recommends, and then introduce your own ideas as a response. Specifically, we suggest that you summarize what "they say" as soon as you can in your text and remind readers of it at strategic points as your text unfolds. Though it's true that not all texts follow this practice, we think it's important for all writers to master it before they depart from it.

This is not to say that you must start with a detailed list of everyone who has written on your subject before you offer your own ideas. Had our conference speaker gone to the opposite extreme and spent most of his talk summarizing Dr. X's critics with no hint of what he himself had to say, the audience probably would have had the same frustrated "why is he going on like this?" reaction. What we suggest, then, is that as soon as possible you state your own position and the one it's responding to *together*, and that you think of the two as a unit. It is generally best to summarize the ideas you're responding to briefly, at the start of your text, and to delay detailed elaboration until later. The point is to give your readers a quick preview of what is motivating your argument, not to drown them in details right away.

Starting with a summary of others' views may seem to contradict the common advice that writers should lead with their own thesis or claim. Although we agree that you shouldn't keep readers in suspense too long about your central argument, we also believe that you need to present that argument as part of some larger conversation, indicating something about the arguments of others that you are supporting, opposing, amending, complicating, or qualifying. One added benefit of summarizing others' views as soon as you can: you let those others do some of the work of framing and clarifying the issue you're writing about.

Consider, for example, how George Orwell starts his famous essay "Politics and the English Language" with what others are saying:

> Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilization is decadent and our language—so the argument runs—must inevitably share in the general collapse. . . .
>
> [But] the process is reversible. Modern English . . . is full of bad habits . . . which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble.

GEORGE ORWELL, "Politics and the English Language"

Orwell is basically saying, "Most people assume that we cannot do anything about the bad state of the English language. But I say we can."

Of course, there are many other powerful ways to begin. Instead of opening with someone else's views, you could start with an illustrative quotation, a revealing fact or statistic, or—as we do in this chapter—a relevant anecdote. If you choose one of these formats, however, be sure that it in some way illustrates the view you're addressing or leads you to that view directly, with a minimum of steps.

In opening this chapter, for example, we devote the first paragraph to an anecdote about the conference speaker and then move quickly at the start of the second paragraph to the misconception about writing exemplified by the speaker. In the following opening, from an opinion piece in the *New York Times Book Review*, Christina Nehring also moves quickly from an anecdote illustrating something she dislikes to her own claim—that book lovers think too highly of themselves:

> "I'm a reader!" announced the yellow button. "How about you?" I looked at its bearer, a strapping young guy stalking my town's Festival of Books. "I'll bet you're a reader," he volunteered, as though we were two geniuses well met. "No," I replied. "Absolutely not," I wanted to yell, and fling my Barnes & Noble bag at his feet. Instead, I mumbled something apologetic and melted into the crowd.
>
> There's a new piety in the air: the self-congratulation of book lovers.

CHRISTINA NEHRING, "Books Make You a Boring Person"

Nehring's anecdote is really a kind of "they say": book lovers keep telling themselves how great they are.

TEMPLATES FOR INTRODUCING WHAT "THEY SAY"

There are lots of conventional ways to introduce what others are saying. Here are some standard templates that we would have recommended to our conference speaker:

- **A number of sociologists have recently suggested <u>that X's work has several fundamental problems</u>.**
- **It has become common today to dismiss __________.**
- **In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of __________ for __________.**

TEMPLATES FOR INTRODUCING "STANDARD VIEWS"

The following templates can help you make what we call the "standard view" move, in which you introduce a view that has become so widely accepted that by now it is essentially the conventional way of thinking about a topic:

- **Americans have always believed that <u>individual effort can triumph over circumstances</u>.**
- **Conventional wisdom has it that __________.**
- **Common sense seems to dictate that __________.**
- **The standard way of thinking about topic X has it that __________.**
- **It is often said that __________.**
- **My whole life I have heard it said that __________.**
- **You would think that __________.**
- **Many people assume that __________.**

These templates are popular because they provide a quick and efficient way to perform one of the most common moves that writers make: challenging widely accepted beliefs, placing them on the examining table, and analyzing their strengths and weaknesses.

TEMPLATES FOR MAKING WHAT "THEY SAY" SOMETHING *YOU* SAY

Another way to introduce the views you're responding to is to present them as your own. That is, the "they say" that you respond to need not be a view held by others; it can be one that you yourself once held or one that you are ambivalent about:

- **I've always believed that <u>museums are boring</u>.**
- **When I was a child, I used to think that __________.**
- **Although I should know better by now, I cannot help thinking that __________.**
- **At the same time that I believe __________, I also believe __________.**

TEMPLATES FOR INTRODUCING SOMETHING IMPLIED OR ASSUMED

Another sophisticated move a writer can make is to summarize a point that is not directly stated in what "they say" but is implied or assumed:

- **Although none of them have ever said so directly, my teachers have often given me the impression that <u>education will open doors</u>.**
- **One implication of X's treatment of __________ is that __________.**
- **Although X does not say so directly, she apparently assumes that __________.**
- **While they rarely admit as much, __________ often take for granted that __________.**

These are templates that can help you think analytically—to look beyond what others say explicitly and to consider their unstated assumptions, as well as the implications of their views.

TEMPLATES FOR INTRODUCING AN ONGOING DEBATE

Sometimes you'll want to open by summarizing a debate that presents two or more views. This kind of opening demonstrates your awareness that there are conflicting ways to look at your subject, the clear mark of someone who knows the subject and therefore is likely to be a reliable, trustworthy guide. Furthermore, opening with a summary of a debate can help you explore the issue you are writing about before declaring your own view. In this way, you can use the writing process itself to help you discover where you stand instead of having to commit to a position before you are ready to do so.

Here is a basic template for opening with a 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 __________.**

The cognitive scientist Mark Aronoff uses this kind of template in an essay on the workings of the human brain:

> Theories of how the mind/brain works have been dominated for centuries by two opposing views. One, rationalism, sees the human mind as coming into this world more or less fully formed—preprogrammed, in modern terms. The other, empiricism, sees the mind of the newborn as largely unstructured, a blank slate.

MARK ARONOFF, "Washington Sleeped Here"

A student writer, Michaela Cullington, uses a version of this template near the beginning of an essay to frame a debate over online writing abbreviations like "LOL" ("laughing out loud") and to indicate her own position in this debate:

> Some people believe that using these abbreviations is hindering the writing abilities of students, and others argue that texting is actually having a positive effect on writing. In fact, it seems likely that texting has no significant effect on student writing.

MICHAELA CULLINGTON, "Does Texting Affect Writing?"

Another way to open with a debate involves starting with a proposition many people agree with in order to highlight the point(s) on which they ultimately disagree:

- **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 __________.**

The political writer Thomas Frank uses a variation on this move:

> That we are a nation divided is an almost universal lament of this bitter election year. However, the exact property that divides us—elemental though it is said to be—remains a matter of some controversy.

THOMAS FRANK, "American Psyche"

KEEP WHAT "THEY SAY" IN VIEW

We can't urge you too strongly to keep in mind what "they say" as you move through the rest of your text. After summarizing the ideas you are responding to at the outset, it's very important to continue to keep those ideas in view. Readers won't be able to follow your unfolding response, much less any complications you may offer, unless you keep reminding them what claims you are responding to.

In other words, even when presenting your own claims, you should keep returning to the motivating "they say." The longer and more complicated your text, the greater the chance that readers will forget what ideas originally motivated it—no matter how clearly you lay them out at the beginning. At strategic moments throughout your text, we recommend that you include what we call "return sentences." Here is an example:

- **In conclusion, then, as I suggested earlier, defenders of __________ can't have it both ways. Their assertion that __________ is contradicted**

by their claim that __________.

We ourselves use such return sentences at every opportunity in this book to remind you of the view of writing that our book questions—that good writing means making true or smart or logical statements about a given subject with little or no reference to what others say about it.

By reminding readers of the ideas you're responding to, return sentences ensure that your text maintains a sense of mission and urgency from start to finish. In short, they frame your argument as a genuine response to others' views rather than just a set of observations about a given subject. The difference is huge. To be responsive to others and the conversation you're entering, you need to start with what others are saying and continue keeping it in the readers' view.

Exercises

1. Following is a list of topics people have debated. Working by yourself or with a partner, compose a "they say" argument for each of these topics, using any of the templates from this chapter.

   Example:

   Self-driving vehicles. "Many people think that self-driving cars will make roads safer by reducing accidents caused by unavoidable human errors."

   a. Free college tuition at public universities
   b. Social media use among teenagers
   c. The value of studying the humanities in college
   d. Public-funded clean needle exchanges
   e. Assigning homework in elementary school

   When you finish, read aloud and compare your "they say" arguments with a partner or a small group. Which template moves were more challenging than others to use? Why do you think so?

2. Read the following passage from Kenneth Goldsmith's 2016 *Los Angeles Times* op-ed, "Go Ahead: Waste Time on the Internet."

   The notion that the Internet is bad for you seems premised on the idea that the Internet is one thing—a monolith. In reality it's a befuddling mix of the stupid and the sublime, a shattered, contradictory, and fragmented medium. Internet detractors seem to miss this simple fact, which is why so many of their criticisms disintegrate under observation.

   The way Internet pundits tell it, you'd think we stare for three hours at clickbait—those articles with hypersensational headlines—the way we once sat down and

watched three hours of cartoons on Saturday morning TV. But most of us don't do any one thing on the Internet. Instead, we do many things, some of it frivolous, some of it heavy. Our time spent in front of the computer is a mixed time, a time that reflects our desires—as opposed to the time spent sitting in front of the television where we were fed shows we didn't necessarily enjoy. TV gave us few choices. Many of us truly did feel like we wasted our time—as our parents so often chided us —"rotting away" in front of the TV.

I keep reading—on screens—that in the age of screens we've lost our ability to concentrate, that we've become distracted. But when I look around me and see people riveted to their devices, I notice a great wealth of concentration, focus, and engagement.

a. Where in this passage do you see Goldsmith introducing what others are saying about the internet and the amount of time we spend on screens? What do you notice about the different ways Goldsmith introduces "they say" arguments?
b. Summarize Goldsmith's argument by using the following template for introducing an ongoing debate (p. 26):

In discussions of **how the internet affects people**, one controversial issue has been __________. On one hand, __________ argues __________. On the other hand, __________ contends __________. Others even maintain __________. My own view is __________.

3. Read over something you've written for one of your classes—a paragraph, a short response, or an essay—and then respond to the following questions. You can do this exercise with a partner or by yourself.

   a. Where do you introduce what others are saying? Underline or highlight where you include a "they say." If you can't find a "they say" in your writing, add one using one of the templates from this chapter.
   b. How soon in your argument do you introduce these other views? Make sure that you include a "they say" early in your writing (in the first paragraph or two for a short response or essay). If the views you're responding to are buried later in your piece, revise your writing so that they appear earlier.

TWO

"HER POINT IS"

The Art of Summarizing

* * *

IF IT IS TRUE, as we claim in this book, that to argue persuasively you need to be in dialogue with others, then summarizing others' arguments is central to your arsenal of basic moves. Because writers who make strong claims need to map their claims relative to those of other people, it is important to know how to summarize effectively what those other people say. (We're using the word "summarizing" here to refer to any information from others that you present in your own words, including that which you paraphrase.)

Many writers shy away from summarizing—perhaps because they don't want to take the trouble to go back to the text in question and wrestle with what it says, or because they fear that devoting too much time to other people's ideas will take away from their own. When assigned to write a response to an article, such writers might offer their own views on the article's *topic* while hardly mentioning what the article itself argues or says. At the opposite extreme are those who do nothing *but* summarize. Lacking confidence, perhaps, in their own ideas, these writers so overload their texts with summaries of others' ideas that their own voice gets lost. And since these summaries are not animated by the writers' own interests, they often read like mere lists of things that X thinks or Y says—with no clear focus.

As a general rule, a good summary requires balancing what the original author is saying with the writer's own focus. Generally speaking, a summary must at once be true to what the original author says while also emphasizing those aspects of what the author says that interest you, the writer. Striking this delicate balance can be tricky, since it means facing two ways at once: both outward (toward the author being summarized) and inward (toward yourself). Ultimately, it means being respectful of others but simultaneously structuring how you summarize them in light of your own text's central argument.

ON THE ONE HAND, PUT YOURSELF IN *THEIR* SHOES