GENERAL

they say i say template

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Introduction

When you sit down to write a research paper, essay, or any piece that requires a solid argument, you'll quickly realize that the key to convincing readers is not just what you say, but how you frame it in relation to existing ideas. The **they say, I say template**offers a tried and true method for weaving your voice into the broader conversation. It helps you position yourself as a thoughtful participant in the scholarly dialogue, rather than a lone voice shouting into the void.

Developed by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein in their bestselling book *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, the template has become a staple in high school, college, and university writing courses worldwide. It is not a rigid set of rules but a flexible framework that encourages clarity, engagement, and critical thinking.

In this article, we'll explore the origins of the template, its core components, practical ways to implement it, and common pitfalls to avoid. By the end, you'll be able to confidently use the **they say, I say template**to strengthen any argumentative piece.

What Is the "They Say, I Say" Template?

The template is essentially a set of rhetorical "moves" that guide writers through the process of engaging with other scholars' ideas before presenting their own. It centers on three fundamental questions:

1. What are the main points of the existing literature?
2. How do you respond to those points?
3. What new insight or perspective do you bring?

By answering these questions systematically, writers create a clear narrative that acknowledges the conversation's context while advancing their own argument. The template includes a handful of reusable phrases—often called "templates" in the academic sense—that help structure the discourse. Some of the most common include:

- They say … but …
- They argue that … yet …
- While many scholars claim … I contend that …
- In contrast to …, my position is …
- Given that …, it follows that …

These phrases are not mechanical; they serve as rhetorical bridges that signal to readers how the writer is engaging with prior work.

Why the Template Matters

Academic writing is a conversation. Without a clear sense of who has said what, readers can lose track of the argument's direction. The **they say, I say template** addresses this by:

- Providing Structure – It offers a predictable pattern that readers can follow, making complex arguments more

digestible.

- Ensuring Credibility – By explicitly citing others, writers demonstrate awareness of the field and respect for scholarly norms.
- Encouraging Critical Thinking – The template forces writers to confront opposing viewpoints, evaluate evidence, and justify their stance.
- Facilitating Revision – Because the template is modular, writers can easily swap in or remove sections during editing without losing coherence.

Core Components of the Template

1. The “They Say” Section

This part summarizes the existing scholarship. It should be concise, accurate, and neutral. Avoid personal judgments here; simply state what the sources argue.

Example:

They saythat climate change mitigation requires a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, as highlighted by Smith (2020) and Johnson (2019).

2. The “I Say” Section

Here you present your own argument. This is where your voice shines. Be clear, concise, and supported by evidence.

Example:

I saythat a hybrid approach, combining renewable energy with strategic carbon capture technologies, offers a more feasible transition path for developing economies.

3. The “Why” or “How” Section

Explain why your position matters or how it resolves gaps in the current debate. This is the bridge that connects the literature to your contribution.

Example:

Becausemany developing nations face infrastructural constraints that make a full renewable transition unrealistic, my proposed hybrid model addresses these practical challenges.

Step by Step Guide to Using the Template

1. Identify Key Sources – Start by selecting the most relevant literature that frames your topic. Aim for a mix of foundational texts and recent studies.
2. Extract the Core Argument – Read each source critically and jot down the main claim. Use paraphrasing to avoid plagiarism.
3. Draft the “They Say” Paragraph – Summarize the collective viewpoint using neutral language. Keep it brief—one to two sentences.
4. State Your Position – In the next sentence, clearly articulate your thesis or claim. Use the “I say” phrasing.
5. Provide Evidence – Back your claim with data, examples, or logical reasoning. This can be in the same paragraph or a follow up sentence.
6. Explain the Significance – Conclude the paragraph by linking your argument to the broader conversation. Explain why it matters.
7. Repeat for Each Argument – For multi point essays, repeat the cycle for each claim or counter claim.

8. Review for Flow – Ensure transitions between “They Say” and “I Say” sections feel natural. Adjust wording if necessary.

Example Paragraphs

Case Study: Urban Planning

They say that increasing green spaces in cities improves air quality and resident well being**However**, critics argue that the cost of land acquisition outweighs the benefits. **I say** that a public private partnership model can offset these costs by involving local businesses in development projects. **Because**such collaborations have proven effective in cities like Singapore, this model offers a scalable solution for mid size urban centers.

Case Study: Education Reform

They say that standardized testing is an objective measure of student learning. **Yet** many educators contend that it fails to capture critical thinking skills. **I say** that incorporating project based assessments alongside traditional tests provides a more holistic evaluation of student competence. **Given**the success of blended assessment models in Finland, this approach could enhance learning outcomes across diverse educational settings.

Adapting the Template to Different Genres

While the template is popular in academic essays, its principles apply to a wide range of writing styles:

- Business Reports – Use “They say” to summarize market research, then “I say” to propose strategic initiatives.
- Opinion Pieces – Present opposing viewpoints first, then state your stance with supporting data.
- Grant Proposals – Cite existing funding gaps (“They say”) and propose your project’s unique contribution (“I say”).
- Blog Posts – When discussing trends, acknowledge common perceptions before offering your insights.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Overloading the “They Say” Section – Avoid summarizing every single source. Focus on the most influential or contrasting viewpoints.
2. Using “They Say” as a Summary of Your Own Argument – Remember that the section should remain neutral; your argument belongs in the “I Say” part.
3. Neglecting Evidence – Claims without support are weak. Pair every assertion with data or citations.
4. Ignoring Counter Arguments – Acknowledge opposing views to show depth of analysis. This strengthens credibility.
5. Repetitive Language – Vary your phrasing. Relying too heavily on the same template phrases can feel mechanical.

Advanced Tips for Mastery

1. Use Signal Words Wisely

Signal words like *however*, *yet*, *therefore*, and *consequently*guide readers through logical progression. Use them sparingly to avoid clutter.

2. Layer Your Arguments

Complex topics often require multiple “They Say – I Say” exchanges. Organize them in a hierarchical manner, starting with the most general claim and narrowing down to specifics.

3. Integrate Visual Aids

Charts, graphs, and tables can reinforce your evidence. Reference them within your “I Say” section to maintain coherence.

4. Practice Paraphrasing

Accurate paraphrasing is essential to avoid plagiarism. Read a source, then write the summary from memory. Compare with the original to ensure fidelity.

5. Peer Review

Having others read your draft can highlight areas where the “They Say” and “I Say” sections feel disjointed. Use feedback to refine transitions.

Resources for Further Learning

- They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing – The foundational text by Graff & Birkenstein.
- Harvard College Writing Center – Offers templates and examples for academic writing.
- Purdue OWL – Provides guidelines on argumentative essays and citation styles.
- Google Scholar – Use it to find key articles for your “They Say” section.
- Grammarly or Hemingway Editor – Tools that help refine sentence structure and readability.

Conclusion

The **they say, I say template**is more than a set of phrases; it is a strategic approach to positioning your voice within an ongoing scholarly conversation. By clearly mapping the existing landscape and articulating your contribution, you create an engaging, credible, and persuasive narrative. Whether you’re drafting a research paper, a business proposal, or a blog post, this template offers a flexible framework that can elevate your writing to the next level.

Remember, the goal is not to mimic the template but to internalize its logic. Once you do, every piece you write will feel like a confident dialogue with the world of ideas—ready to say, “I say,” and make your mark.

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