



They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing Chapter Questions

These questions can be answered after completing each of the chapters we have pulled from the fourth edition (2018) of *They Say, I Say*, by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. Students can discuss these in small groups, write responses individually, or engage with them in a seminar.

Introduction: Entering the Conversation

1. What do Graff and Birkenstein tell us is the single most important idea in the book? Formulating the same question differently, what is the book's main argument? Cite a passage that supports your answer.
2. How do the authors respond to the charge that an argument-based approach to writing is overly contentious or contrarian?
3. Identify and summarize three arguments Graff and Birkenstein make for the use of templates. Provide textual evidence supporting each of the three points, quoting to support one or two and paraphrasing to support the other(s).
4. Choose a controversial or debatable issue, either in our society generally or in your classes from last year, and use it to complete the "template of templates" (11).

Chapter Two: The Art of Summarizing

1. What is Peter Elbow's "believing game" and how is it used in the "art of summarizing"? Why is it so important to producing effective summaries?
2. What do Graff and Birkenstein mean when they say that a summary has to "point in two directions at once" (35)? How can such a bi-directional summary have maximum value for your argument?
3. Quote three sentences from the chapter in which the authors demonstrate summary using three different "signal verbs."

Chapter Four: Three Ways to Respond

1. Graff and Birkenstein acknowledge objections to their view that there are three basic categories of response to others' arguments: agree, disagree, or some combination of both. Some say that this is overly reductive and that certain academic arguments are more complex than this. Others say that certain arguments – some literary interpretations, for instance – are made independent of anyone else's arguments or interpretations. Summarize in detail their response to each counter-argument.
2. If your argument is in agreement with other people's views that you are quoting or paraphrasing in your writing (or speaking), what must you also do in addition to merely agreeing? Why is this additional move so important?



3. Pick two of the chapter's templates for agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously. Use them on two different controversial issues (again, either issues in society or from your classes last year). Provide a brief explanation under each use as to how you would develop this argument in a longer piece of writing.

Chapter Six: Planting a Naysayer in Your Text

1. Identify as many discrete arguments for “planting a naysayer” as you can in the “Anticipate Objections” section of the chapter (78-81). Quote the single strongest sentence (or two) from this section, in your judgment.
2. What are some of the different ways for you to introduce objections or counter-arguments into your writing?
3. What method do Graff and Birkenstein recommend above the others for responding to refuting the objections or counter-arguments you include in your writing (or speaking)? What advantage do the authors tell us they associate with this refutation method?

Chapter Twelve: Entering Class Discussions

1. Why is it important, according to the authors, for you to *both* name the person whose argument you are responding to in a classroom conversation *and* summarize the substance of their argument?
2. “But won’t it sound redundant to summarize others’ arguments this way in a discussion?” The authors implant this counter-argument in the middle of this chapter; how do they respond to it?
3. Summarize the two overall recommendations that Graff and Birkenstein have in the chapter’s final section for successful classroom discussion participation.

Chapter Fourteen: Reading for the Conversation

1. What did Graff and Birkenstein do to improve their questioning technique in their classes, and how did it work so well?
2. Put in your own words the two different conversations that Tamara Draut and Judith Butler are entering in the passages from these authors quoted in the chapter.
3. Find an essay online from the New York Times, The Guardian, Atlantic, or Slate, and (a) summarize the conversation that the author is entering, and (b) state the author’s “I say,” their overall position or main argument.

Chapter Fifteen: Entering Conversations about Literature

1. Who are the different other voices – the sources of the “they say” – when it comes to making arguments about literature, according to the authors?
2. Explain the various ways that focusing on the conflict in a literary text is crucial to the process of making arguments about it.
3. How do the authors recommend that you contest the evidence used in interpretive arguments about literature?