

they say i say the moves that matter in academic writing

They say, I say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing is a pivotal text that demystifies the complexities of academic discourse through a clear and engaging lens. Written by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, this book has become a staple in writing courses across various educational institutions. It emphasizes the importance of dialogue in academic writing, encouraging students to engage with existing literature and articulate their arguments effectively. This article explores the core concepts, strategies, and applications of the book, illustrating how its principles can enhance academic writing skills.

Understanding the Dialogue of Academic Writing

At its essence, academic writing is a conversation. Graff and Birkenstein emphasize that effective writing does not solely present the writer's views but rather positions them within a larger dialogue. This principle can be broken down into several foundational moves that writers should employ:

The "They Say" Move

1. **Introducing Existing Conversations:** The first step in academic writing is to acknowledge the perspectives that already exist on a topic. This move involves summarizing the views of others, demonstrating an understanding of the broader discourse.
2. **Citing Sources:** Using quotes, paraphrases, or summaries, writers must provide evidence of what "they say." This not only lends credibility but also situates the writer's argument within established scholarship.
3. **Framing the Argument:** After presenting the existing views, the writer can begin to frame their own argument in relation to those perspectives. This helps clarify the significance of the new argument.

The "I Say" Move

1. **Stating Your Position:** The "I say" move is where the writer asserts their own argument or perspective. This is crucial as it marks the writer's unique contribution to the conversation.
2. **Responding to Counterarguments:** Effective writing anticipates and addresses potential objections. By acknowledging counterarguments, writers strengthen their position and demonstrate critical engagement with the topic.
3. **Connecting Back to the "They Say":** Writers should continually link their arguments back to the existing literature, creating a cohesive dialogue that highlights the relevance of their contributions.

The Importance of Structuring Arguments

Effective academic writing relies heavily on a well-structured argument. Graff and Birkenstein provide several strategies for organizing ideas that resonate with the "they say, I say" framework.

Structuring Your Argument

1. Thesis Development: A strong thesis statement should encapsulate the main argument while also hinting at the "they say" framework. This sets the stage for the reader and establishes the writer's position.

2. Utilizing Templates: The authors offer a series of templates that facilitate the "they say, I say" approach. These templates help writers articulate their ideas clearly and ensure they are engaging with existing literature effectively. Here are a few examples:

- "Although X argues that ..., I contend that ..."
- "While some may say that ..., I believe ..."
- "In response to X, I argue that ..."

3. Logical Flow: Each point should logically lead to the next. Writers should ensure that their arguments build upon one another, guiding the reader through the discourse seamlessly.

Transitional Phrases

Effective transitions are crucial in maintaining the flow of an academic paper. Graff and Birkenstein suggest using specific phrases to guide readers through the argument:

- To introduce a counterargument: "On the one hand, ..."
- To reinforce a point: "Furthermore, ..."
- To summarize: "In summary, ..."

These transitions not only clarify the writer's intentions but also enhance the readability of the text.

Engaging with Sources

The relationship between a writer's ideas and the existing literature is foundational to academic writing. Graff and Birkenstein stress the need for writers to engage with sources actively.

Critical Engagement with Sources

1. Evaluating Credibility: Writers should assess the credibility of their sources, ensuring that they draw from reputable and relevant literature. This bolsters the legitimacy of their arguments.

2. Incorporating Diverse Perspectives: Engaging with a variety of viewpoints enriches the writer's own arguments. Writers should not shy away from opposing views; instead, they should integrate them into their analysis.

3. Synthesis of Ideas: Rather than merely summarizing sources, effective writers synthesize information from various texts to develop a nuanced understanding of the topic.

Quoting and Paraphrasing

1. Direct Quotes: When using direct quotes, writers should ensure they contextualize the quote, explaining its significance and relevance to their argument.

2. Paraphrasing: This technique allows writers to incorporate ideas from other texts while maintaining their voice. It is crucial, however, to accurately represent the original idea.

3. Maintaining Academic Integrity: Proper citation practices are essential in academic writing. Writers must adhere to the required citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) to avoid plagiarism and give credit to original authors.

Revising and Refining Your Argument

The writing process does not end with the first draft. Graff and Birkenstein highlight the importance of revision in developing a strong academic argument.

Strategies for Effective Revision

1. Self-Reflection: Writers should critically assess their arguments. Questions to consider include:

- Does my argument engage effectively with the "they say" framework?
- Have I adequately addressed counterarguments?
- Is my thesis clear and well-supported?

2. Peer Review: Sharing drafts with peers can provide valuable feedback. Others may identify gaps or weaknesses in the argument that the writer may have overlooked.

3. Seeking Instructor Feedback: Engaging with instructors can provide insights into how well the writer is meeting academic expectations and adhering to the "they say, I say" framework.

Final Editing for Clarity and Cohesion

1. Proofreading: Attention to grammar, punctuation, and formatting is crucial. Mistakes can detract from the credibility of the argument.

2. Ensuring Cohesion: Writers should ensure that each paragraph connects back to the main

argument and contributes to the overall thesis.

3. Final Read-Aloud: Reading the paper aloud can help writers identify awkward phrases and ensure that the argument flows smoothly.

Conclusion

They say, I say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing serves as a comprehensive guide for navigating the intricacies of academic discourse. By employing the "they say, I say" framework, writers can effectively engage with existing literature, articulate their arguments clearly, and contribute meaningfully to scholarly conversations. The strategies outlined in the book empower students and writers at all levels to enhance their academic writing skills, ultimately fostering a more robust and nuanced understanding of their subjects. As academic writing remains a fundamental skill across disciplines, the principles articulated by Graff and Birkenstein will continue to resonate with aspiring writers seeking to make their voices heard in the academic arena.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main thesis of 'They Say / I Say'?

'They Say / I Say' focuses on the importance of engaging with the ideas of others in academic writing, emphasizing the need to present opposing viewpoints before articulating one's own argument.

How does 'They Say / I Say' suggest structuring an argument?

The book advocates for a clear structure that includes introducing what others have said ('they say'), followed by presenting your own perspective ('I say') to create a dialogue.

What are some key templates provided in 'They Say / I Say'?

The book provides various templates for expressing agreement, disagreement, and nuance in arguments, such as 'Although I agree with X, I contend that...'.

Why is using templates beneficial in academic writing?

Using templates helps writers articulate their thoughts more clearly and effectively, providing a scaffold that can enhance the clarity and coherence of their arguments.

How does 'They Say / I Say' address the importance of counterarguments?

The book emphasizes that addressing counterarguments not only strengthens one's own position but also demonstrates critical engagement with the topic, making the writing more persuasive.

In what ways can 'They Say / I Say' improve critical thinking skills?

'They Say / I Say' encourages writers to consider multiple perspectives, fostering a habit of critical analysis and reflective thinking about their own and others' arguments.

Who is the intended audience for 'They Say / I Say'?

The book is aimed at students, educators, and anyone involved in academic writing who seeks to enhance their argumentative skills and engage thoughtfully with existing literature.

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