Graff and Birkenstein contend that academic writing never happens in a vacuum but is instead constructed as a dialogue or response to the ideas, writings, and research of others. As a result, it centers around the “they say, I say” model, where your thesis statement functions as the primary, critical “I say” moment in your text, built around and in response to what others “say” about your topic (4).

Here are some model templates which can be used to express agreement, disagreement, or a combination of both:

- She argues ____________, and I agree because ____________.
- His argument that ____________ is supported by new research showing that ____________.
- In recent discussions of ____________, a controversial issue has been whether ____________ or ____________. On the one hand, some argue that ____________. From this perspective, ____________. On the other hand, however, others argue that ____________. In the words of ____________, one of this view's main proponents, “__________.” According to this view, ____________. In sum, then, the issue is whether ____________ or ____________.
  - My own view is that ____________. Though I concede that ____________, I still maintain that ____________.
  - For example, ____________. Although some might object that ____________, I would reply that ____________.
  - The issue is important because ____________.

- In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of ____________. However, their analysis fails to consider ____________.
- Adding to X's argument, I would point out that ____________.
- Although some readers may object that ____________, I would answer that ____________.

Templates for Introducing Something Implied or Assumed

- One implication of X’s treatment of ____________ is ____________.
- X apparently assumes that ____________. However, ____________.
- While they rarely admit as much, _______ often take for granted ____________.

Templates for Introducing an Ongoing 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 ____________.

Templates for Quoting and Explaining Quotations

- X complicates matters further when she writes, “__________.”
- X convincingly argues, “__________.”
- X further contends, “__________.”
- In making this comments, X urges us to “__________.”
- The essence of X's argument is that “__________.”

Thanks to Dr. Hiner for compiling this information from They Say, I say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein