

Academic phrases

On the next page you'll find a list of phrases* taken from several sources, including a popular college writing handbook by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein titled *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*.

The word “moves” in the title is crucial because it suggests that these phrases should not be copied verbatim. Instead, they represent the kind of intellectual moves – thought processes – that academics use when thinking about a topic or responding to a reading. They're heuristics (see page on Annotation Suggestions for more on this) that push you into a deeper understanding of a topic and provide structures/language to present that understanding.

Another way of looking at them? Algorithms. Mental steps that move the program (your thinking/writing) through a series of operational steps that lead to solutions. And note the plural in the last word of the previous sentence: it's essential in the kind of thinking and writing this course is meant to engender.

And to keep working on the plural, I've also added two pages of signal phrases from another source. Together, these should provide you with enough rhetorical moves to dance through your essay.

Questions and Answers

How about a question and answer session to clarify these ideas.

Okay.

Italics are a student's question; regular font are my answers

What should I avoid?

Mechanically inserting these phrases into your own writing by filling in the blanks.

What should I embrace?

Mentally filling in the blanks then expressing the resulting ideas in clear and vivid prose.

But can't I use these for the rough draft?

Well . . . you may get away with them as you form your thoughts.

But I'll be sure to change and refine the wording in later drafts to add complexity and depth to my thinking – and add flavor to my prose.

Sounds to me like you're thinking like a writer; can't wait to taste your essay.

They Say/I Say Templates*

Why Templates?

Academic writing requires presenting your sources and your ideas effectively to readers. According to Graff and Birkenstein, the first element in the process involves “entering a conversation about ideas” between you—the writer—and your sources to reflect your critical thinking (ix). The templates allow you, the writer, to organize your ideas in relationship to your thesis, supporting evidence, opposing evidence, and the conclusion of the argument.

The Most Important Templates:

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 _____.

She argues _____, and I agree because _____.

Her argument that _____ is supported by new research showing that _____.

In recent discussions of _____, a controversial issue has been whether _____. On the one hand, some argue that _____. On the other hand, however, others argue that _____.

Introducing Standard Views:

Americans today tend to believe that _____.

Conventional wisdom has it that _____.

My whole life I have heard it said that _____.

Making those Views Something You Say:

I have always believed that _____.

When I was a child, I used to think that _____.

Writing a Summary:

She demonstrates that _____.

In fact, they celebrate the fact that _____.

Introducing a Quote:

X insists, “_____.”

As the prominent philosopher X puts it, “_____.”

According to X, “_____.”

In her book, Book Title, X maintains that _____.

X complicates matters further when she writes that _____.

Disagreeing:

I think that X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.

I disagree with X’s view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.

Introducing Your Point of View:

X overlooks what I consider an important point about _____.

I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls _____.

My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of _____.

These conclusions will have significant applications in _____ as well as in _____.

Working with Two or more Sources

Both _Author 1_ and _Author 2_ believe that _____.

Author 1 suggests/argues/believes/etc. that _” “().

Similarly, _Author 2_ suggests/argues/believes/etc. that _____ “ “(). This suggests _x_ because _____.

The sentences that follow are particularly effective when explaining a quote or advancing your argument.

Arguing for and against

This becomes clear when one examines...

This lends weight to the argument that...

Support for this interpretation comes from...

While it may well be valid that..., this study argues the importance of...

A serious drawback of this approach is...

One of the prime failings of this theory or explanation is...

Reviewing other work

X takes little or no account of...

There is little evidence to suggest that...

The study offers only cursory examination of...

X gives a detailed if not always tenable analysis of...

The authors' claim that...is not well founded.

X's explanation is not implausible, if not entirely satisfactory.

Analysis and explanation

If, for the sake of argument, we assume...

One of the most obvious consequences of...is...

Although it may well be true that..., it is important not to overlook...

It is important to distinguish carefully between...

The extent to which this reflects...is unclear.

A more plausible explanation for or of...would...

The reason for...is unknown, but...has been suggested by X as a possible factor.

From

Phrase Book for Writing Papers and Research

LOGICAL CONNECTIVES

RELEVANT FOR ALL INTERPRETIVE ESSAYS

ANSWERS TO “WHY?” QUESTIONS

Because
Since
Consequently
So
Hence
Therefore
Accordingly
As a result

ANSWERS TO “HOW” QUESTIONS

In this way
With the effect that

ANALYSIS/CLOSE READING

Imply
Infer
Explore
Suggest
Illuminate
Highlight
Draw attention to
Reveal
Indicate

LOGICAL SHIFTS

However
Although
But
Yet
While
Initially
Even though
Whereas
Nevertheless
Regardless
Despite
If...then
On the one hand...on the other hand
Not only...but also

ELABORATION

Actually
By extension
To put it another way
In other words
In short
That is

SPECIFICITY

Especially
In particular

ADDITIVE LOGIC

Also
And
In addition
Furthermore
Moreover

PARALLELISM

Just as
In the same way that

DESCRIBING AUTHORIAL ACTION

X claims that...
X suggests that...
X argues that...
X observes that...
X acknowledges that...
X concedes that...
X demonstrates that...
X emphasizes that...
X agrees that...
X denies that...
X reminds us that...
X refutes the claim that...
X questions whether...
X urges us to...

INTRODUCING QUOTATIONS

X states, “...”
As the researcher X puts it, “...”
According to X, “...”
In X’s view, “...”
In his book, [*Title*], X maintains, “...”
Writing in the journal *Theory, Culture, and Society*,
X asserts that, “...”
X complicates this understanding when she
writes, “...”

MLA Signal Phrases for Quotes/Paraphrases

Use longer phrases to signal your view of a quote/paraphrase:

Phrases to show that you agree with an author's claims:

Warren The article	offers presents	a useful/timely/thorough/important ... an effective counterargument/interpretation ... ample evidence of ...
Warren's	interpretation analysis argument	is incisive/cogent/persuasive/effective because ... is relevant to/has significant practical applications for ... effectively proves/integrates/challenges/explains ...

Phrases to show that you disagree with an author's claims:

Warren	ignores/overlooks ... oversimplifies/downplays ... incorrectly assumes ...	
Warren The study The article	fails to makes no attempt to	acknowledge/address/consider ... distinguish between ... provide evidence for ...
Warren's	interpretation analysis argument	is problematic because/assumes that ... does not/fails to ... overlooks the deeper problem ... rests upon the questionable claim/assumption ...

Phrases for Concessions & Rebuttals:

Concession Admit that the other side has some merit.	Refutation Phrases Point out the flaws in the other side, and return to your claim.
It is true that ... Certainly... Admittedly... Of course... Obviously... It may seem that ... Although X is right that ... X is right to argue that ...	But more careful analysis shows that... However, ... therefore, ... On the other hand, ... so... Nevertheless, ... as a result... However, it is less certain that ... Therefore, ... Nonetheless, ... Thus, ... However, the conclusion that ... is questionable because... But it does not necessary follow that. In fact, ...