Literature Review Templates:  

How to Present What ‘They’ Say

The following templates help writers introduce and discuss sources (‘they’) when writing a literature review. Additionally, these templates help writers summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of their sources in order to help the writer establish creditability and provide a solid background for a research paper or project.

**THEY SAY: Reporting what authors are saying about a topic**

**VERB TENSE & SOURCES**

- **APA:** In APA, when you discuss cited sources, you are required to use PAST TENSE (e.g., Smith argued) or PRESENT PERFECT TENSE (e.g., Smith [and Jones] has [have] argued). See pg. 33 in the APA Manual for more information.
- **MLA:** Generally, in MLA, when you discuss cited sources, use PRESENT TENSE (e.g. Smith believes). PRESENT PERFECT TENSE can also be used, but definitively there are no rules for verb tense and sources in the MLA Handbook.

**Introducing an Ongoing Debate**

- **APA**
  - In discussion of X, one controversial issue has been___________. On the one hand, ________ argued ___________. On the other hand, _________ contended ___________. Some researchers, such as__________, have maintained ____________.
- **MLA**
  - When it comes to the topic of ______, most of expert/scholars/researchers will readily agree that ________. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of _____________. Whereas some are convinced that ____________, others maintain that _____________.

**Templates for Introducing What “They Say”**

- A number of sociologists have recently suggested that X’s work has several fundamental problems. [The underlined word can be replaced with other nouns appropriate to your field of study—researchers, scientists, politicians, feminists, etc.]
- It has become common today to dismiss X’s contribution to the field of _____.
- In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of X for _____.

**Templates for Introducing “Standard Views”**

Standard views are views that have become so widely accepted that by now it is essentially the conventional way of thinking about a topic. [The underlined word can be replaced with other nouns appropriate to your field of study—researchers, scientists, politicians, feminists, etc.]

- Americans today tend to believe that ________
- Conventional wisdom has it that ________.
- The standard way of thinking about topic X has been _______.
- Many students assume that ________.
Introducing Quotations and Summaries

APA [notice the verbs are past tense]
- She demonstrated that _______.
- In X’s study of _____, she found that _______
- They argued _______.

MLA [notice the verbs are in present tense]
- __________, he admits.
- He states,______.

Verbs for Introducing Summaries and Quotations

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Verbs for Questioning or Disagreeing

| Complain                      | Advocate                       |
| Question                      | Implore                        |
| Complicate                    | Call for                        |
| Refute                        | Plead                          |
| Contend                       | Demand                         |
| Reject                        | Recommend                      |
| Contradict                    | Encourage                      |
| Renounce                      | Urge                           |
| Deny                          | Exhort                         |
| Repudiate                     | Warn                           |

Frame Every Quote

Since quotations do not speak for themselves, you need to build a frame around them in which you do that speaking for them. You need to make a ‘quotation sandwich’ [Introduction-quotation-explanation]. Introduce the quotation adequately by explaining who is speaking and setting up what the quotation says. Then follow up with explaining why you consider the quotation important and what you take it to say. [The () represents the placement of your in-text citation.]

For introducing quotations

APA
- X (year) stated, “_________” (p. #).
- As the prominent researcher/scholar X (year) put it, “_____” (p. #).
- According to X (year), “_____” (p. #).
- X (year) himself wrote, “_______” (p. #).
- In her book, _____, X (year) maintained that “_________” (p. #).

MLA
- In X’s view, “_______” (page #).
- X agrees when she writes, “_______” (page #).
- X disagrees when he writes, “_________” (page #).
- X complicates matters further when she writes, “__________” (page #).
For explaining quotations

- Basically, X is saying ______.
- In other words, X believes ______.
- In making this comment, X argues that ________.
- X is insisting that ________.
- X’s point is that ________.
- The essence of X’s argument is that ________.

**DO NOT** introduce quotations by saying something like “X asserts an idea that” or “A quote by X says.” Introductory phrases like these are both redundant and misleading.

**Additional Resources**


Created by Keva Sherven for the UWC—April 2010

Most of the examples are taken directly from *They Say, I Say* by Graff & Birkenstein
Templates to Declare the Writer’s Position:
How to Present What ‘I’ Say

The following templates help writers introduce and discuss your own ideas as a writer (‘I’) when writing a paper that requires the writer’s response to or stance/position on a topic. Furthermore, these templates help writers agree, disagree, or both agree and disagree with sources in order to declare their position relative to the views they’ve summarized or quoted.

I SAY: a writer offering his/her own argument as a response to what ‘they’ said

Experienced writers know how to express their thoughts. Since academic writing, broadly speaking, is argumentative, college writers need to argue well. Thus, writers need to be able to assert their own ideas as well as enter the ongoing conversation (they say) of a topic and use the ideas of others as a launching pad for furthering their ideas. Many times the use of “I” is appropriate; however, check with your professor.

Disagreeing, with Reasons

- I think X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.
- X’s claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that ______.
- I disagree with X’s view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.
- X contradicts himself/can’t have it both ways. On the one hand, he argues _____. But on the other hand, he also says ______.
- By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of ______.
- X claims ______, but we don’t need him to tell us that. Anyone familiar with ______ has long known that ______.

Agreeing

- I agree that _____ because my experience _____ confirms it.
- X is surely right about _____ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that ______.
- X’s theory of _____ is extremely useful because it shed insight on the difficult problem of ______.
- I agree that ______, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe ______.
- Those unfamiliar with this school of thought may be interested to know that it basically boils down to ______.

Agreeing and Disagreeing Simultaneously

- Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that _____.
- Although I disagree with much that X says, I fully endorse his final conclusion that ______.
- Though I concede that _____, I still insist that ______.
- X is right that _____, but she seems on more dubious ground when she claims that ______.
- While X is probably wrong when she claims that ________, she is right that ______.
- Whereas X provides ample evidence that _____, Y and Z’s research on _____ and _____ convinces me that _______ instead.
- I’m of two minds about X’s claims that ______. On the one hand, I agree that _____ . On the other hand, I’m not sure if ______.
- My feelings on the issue are mixed. I do support X’s position that _____ , but I find Y’s arguments about _____ and Z’s research on _____ to be equally persuasive.
Signaling who is Saying What in Your Own Writing

“I” can be used in well-grounded and well-supported arguments just as those that don’t use “I”. Some occasions may warrant avoiding first person (“I”). Overuse of “I” can also result in a monotonous series of “I” statements—“I believe, I think, I argue”. It is a good idea to mix first-person assertions with assertions that signal your position without using “I”.

- X argues ______.
- According to both X and Y ______.
- Politicians, X argues, should ______.
- Most athletes will tell you that ______.
- My own view, however, is that ______.
- I agree, as X may not realize, that ______.
- X is right that ______.
- X’s assertion that ___ does not fit the facts.
- Anyone familiar with ______ should agree that ______.
- But ______ are real, and are arguably the most significant factor in ______.

Templates for Signaling Who is Saying What in Your Own Writing

- X argues ______.
- According to both X and Y, ______.
- Politicians, X argues, should ______.
- Most athletes will tell you that ______.
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- But ______ are real, and are arguably the most significant factor in ______.

Indicate Multiple Perspectives—“I” versus “They” [p.70]

Point-of-view clues in the text that clearly separates the views of the writer (“I”) from those of source authors (“they”).

- X overlooks what I consider an important point about ______.
- My own view is that what X insists is a _____ is in fact a ______.
- I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls ______.
- These conclusions, which X discusses in ______, add weight to the argument that ______.

Entertaining Objections

Notice that the following examples are not attributed to any specific person or group, but to “skeptics,” “readers,” or “many”. This kind of nameless, faceless naysayer is appropriate in some cases.

- Yet some readers may challenge my view that ______. After all, many believe that ______.
- Indeed, my own argument that _____ seems to ignore ____ and ____.
- Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that______.

Naming Your Naysayers

The underlined words can be interchanged with another specific group.

- Here many feminists would probably object that ______.
- But social Darwinists would certainly taken issue with the argument that ______.
- Biologists, of course, may want to dispute my claim that ______.
- Nevertheless, both followers and critics of Malcolm X will probably suggest otherwise and argue that ______.
To minimize stereotyping...

- Although not all Christians think alike, some of them will probably dispute my claim that ____.
- Non-native English speakers are so diverse in their views that it’s hard to generalize about them, but some are likely to object on the grounds that ____.

Making Concessions While Still Standing Your Ground

- Although I grant that _____, I still maintain that ____.
- Proponents of X are right to argue that _____. But they exaggerate when they claim that _____.
- While it is true that ______, it does not necessarily follow that _______.
- On the one hand, I agree with X that_________. But on the other hand, I still insist that _____.

Indicating Who Cares

Underlined words can be replaced with other groups or references to certain people.

- _____ used to think _______. But recently [or within the past few decades], ______ suggests that _______.
- This interpretation challenges the work of those critics who have long assumed that ____.
- These finding challenge the work of earlier researchers, who tended to assume that _____.
- Recent studies like these shed new light on ______, which previous studies had not addressed.
- These findings challenge dieters’ common assumption that _____.
- At first glance, teenagers might say _______. But on closer inspection.

Why Your Claim Matters

- X matters/is important because _______.
- Although X might seem trivial, it is in fact crucial in terms of today’s concern over _______.
- Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____.
- These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of _______.
- My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of _______.
- These conclusions/This discovery will have significant applications in _____ as well as in _____.

So What and Who Cares

- Although X may seem of concern to only a small group of ______, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about _______.

Page References for They Say, I Say

- Pages 1-47 contain “They Say” templates and explanations
- Pages 51-97 contain “I Say” templates and explanations
- Pages 101-135 contain “Tying it All Together” templates and explanations
- Pages 163-176 contain the Index of Templates used in the book

Additional Resources


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