

Having a Conversation with Sources
from *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*
by Graff and Birkenstein

How do I make my secondary sources work hard for me in my essay? Good question—

You need to have a conversation with your secondary sources in the body paragraphs of your synthesis essay. The model sentences below will help you develop the art of conversation with your source material, so your voice and thinking dominates your paper.

I. Introducing What “They Say”

- * A number of presidential hopefuls have recently suggested that X’s work on poverty has several fundamental problems.
- * It has become common today to dismiss X’s contribution to the field of sociology.
- * In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of Dr. X for _____.

II. Introducing Standard Views

- * Americans today tend to believe that _____.
- * Conventional wisdom has it that _____.
- * Common sense seems to dictate that _____.
- * The standard way of thinking about topic X is that _____.
- * It is often said that _____.

III. Introducing Something Implied or Assumed

- * Although none of them have ever said so directly, my teachers have often given me the impression that _____.
- * One implication of X’s treatment of _____ is that _____.
- * Although X does not say so directly, she apparently assumes that _____.

IV. Capturing Authorial Intent

Argues Acknowledges Believes Denies/does not deny Claims Complains
Concedes Demonstrates Deplores Celebrates Emphasizes Insists Observes
Questions Refutes Reminds Reports Suggests Urges

* X agrees that _____.

V. Disagreeing, With Reasons

* X is mistaken because she overlooks _____

* X's claim that _____ rests on the questionable assumption that _____.

* X contradicts herself/can't have it both ways. On the one hand she argues _____ . But on the other hand, she also says _____.

* By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of _____.

VI. 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 _____.

* Even though X provides ample evidence that _____, Y and Z's research on _____ and _____ convinces me that _____ instead.

* It is right that _____, but she seems on dubious ground when she claims that _____.

* While X is probably wrong when she claims that _____, she is right that _____.

VII. 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 _____.

VIII. 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 _____.

* When it comes to the topic of _____, most of us will agree that _____. Where the agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of _____. Whereas some are convinced that _____, others maintain that _____.

* In conclusion, then, as I suggested earlier, defenders of _____ can't have it both ways. Their assertion that _____ is contradicted by their claim that _____.