

Title of Module: **Integrating Ideas from *They Say/I Say* into Your Writing**

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Outline of Module

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2. Responding to the Words of other Authors
 - a. *Different Ways of Responding to What You Read and of Distinguishing Your Own Voice from That of the Original Author*
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 - a. *Using Transitions to Connect Your Ideas*
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 - a. *Classroom Discussions, Digital Communication, and Critical Thinking*
 - b. *Writing about Literature, the Sciences, and the Social Sciences*

Video 1: The *They Say/I Say* Concept

Academic Writing as a Form of Conversation:

To some students, writing an essay in response to a book or article may seem a bit artificial or unnatural, especially if the author is far removed in place or time. What possible connection, you might ask, do you have to this writer? However, if you imagine that you are sitting in the same room with the author, having a conversation, the distance is broken down, and the exchange of ideas becomes more immediate. If you hear something that you disagree with, you can jump in right away to point out how and why your perspective differs. You can do the same thing in your writing. Indeed, speaking and writing are like two sides of the same coin. Whenever you communicate, whether orally or in writing, you put forth ideas that you hope someone else will hear or read – and acknowledge and accept or at least respond to. Working on this premise, the textbook *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing (TSIS)*, by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, helps you develop strategies to improve your writing skills by developing your own voice in response to what others have said. It also helps you expand the range of tools that you can use to express your ideas more effectively. These tools are called *templates*: they convey specific moves in academic discourse and are used in various academic assignments: summary, analysis, synthesis, argument. etc., some of which we'll discuss later.

What Templates Are and Why It's a Good Idea to Use Them:

A *template* is a set word or phrase or expression that you can insert in your writing in order to explain more clearly and accurately what you want to say. There are hundreds of templates, each serving a specific function. For example, you can use templates to:

- Introduce a quote or summary: “**According to** historian Henry Steele Commager....”
- Indicate that you agree or disagree with an author’s argument: “In this instance Richardson **is absolutely right**, while Latrobe **is utterly wrong**.”
- Explain that you agree partially, but not completely, with a viewpoint: “**While I concede** that Dodge’s argument has some merit, **I still insist** that some of his recommended solutions are too extreme.”
- Explain what point you are at in your argument: **First, second, next, finally**.

At this point, you may be wondering if it is okay to use templates: Isn’t it plagiarism to take a ready-made expression and plug it into your own writing without citing its source? The answer to this question is an emphatic **no**: first because these expressions are so common that they do not belong to any one author; and second because they make up only a fragment of a sentence. You use templates to enhance your own ideas, and you are responsible for making sure that they fit in grammatically and contextually with the rest of the sentence.

For example:

(Incorrect) While I concede that Traves’ argument is being imperfect, I do not insist to discard it. In contrast, I believe that it offers many valuable advices.

(Correct) While I concede that Traves’ argument is imperfect, I do not insist on discarding it. On the contrary, I believe that it offers much valuable advice.

Summarizing and Quoting the Words of Others:

A summary is a condensed version of a larger work, such as a book or article: it should briefly, comprehensively, and objectively describe the *essential* content of the original. In other words, a summary should be considerably shorter than the article it summarizes, and it should express the original author’s views. Of course, your summary will focus on the points that are most relevant to your own argument, and you may subject the author’s views to your own interpretation and analysis. When quoting, you should choose passages that are both significant and relevant to the argument that you are making. Be sure to frame the quote properly by doing the following: Let the reader know that a quote is coming; provide adequate context; do not change the author’s original intent by omitting an essential part of the quote; either give a quote that is a complete sentence or integrate a sentence fragment grammatically into your own sentence; and analyze the quote, explaining why it is relevant and how it fits into your discussion. A list of templates and strong verbs for introducing and analyzing in summaries and quotations is provided for reference.

Verbs for Introducing Summaries and Quotations:

Verbs for making a claim:

Argue, assert, believe, claim, emphasize, insist, observe, remind us, report, suggest

Verbs for expressing agreement:

Acknowledge, admire, agree, endorse, extol, praise, celebrate the fact that, corroborate, do not deny, reaffirm, support, verify

Verbs for questioning or disagreeing:

Complain, complicate, contend, contradict, deny, deplore the tendency to, qualify, question, refute, reject, renounce, repudiate

Verbs for making recommendations:

Advocate, call for, demand, encourage, exhort, implore, plead, recommend, urge, warn

Templates for Introducing Quotations:

X states, “_____.”

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

According to X, “_____.”

X herself writes, “_____.”

In her book, *Ciao, Michelangelo*, X maintains that “_____.”

Writing in the journal *Arts Now*, X complains that “_____.”

In X’s view, “_____.”

X agrees/disagrees when she writes, “_____.”

X complicates matters further when she writes, “_____.”

Templates for Explaining Quotations:

Basically, X is warning that

In other words, X believes that

In making this comment, X urges us to

X is corroborating the age-old adage that

X’s point is that

The essence of X’s argument is that

Video 2: Responding to the Words of Other Authors

Different Ways of Responding to What You Read and of Distinguishing Your Own Voice from That of the Original Author:

Once you have summarized the author’s ideas, your next goal is to respond to them. You can do this in one of three ways: by agreeing; by disagreeing; and by agreeing with some of the

author's points while disagreeing with others. Some students may be tempted to agree entirely with an author who writes persuasively and has an established reputation as an expert in a particular field. However, just as you most likely have some differences in tastes and preferences from your friends and classmates, so is it natural for you to have a different perspective from the author, as a result of your unique background. Even if you generally agree with the author, you should "agree – but with a difference," e.g., by thinking of additional examples beyond what that author has given. Also, whether you agree or disagree, you need to be able to explain why, in your own words. Above all, you need to take a stand. Readers will become more engaged with your writing if you make a strong, debatable, controversial claim – and defend it vigorously – than if you merely summarize facts without choosing a side. Moreover, whichever position you adopt, you need to distinguish clearly between your own voice and that of the author. Finally, you need to understand and differentiate between when the author supports or opposes the views that he/she reports.

Dealing with Counterarguments

While some students may think that they should focus all of their attention on proving their own argument, it is equally important to consider and respond to opposing viewpoints. Just as, when preparing for an oral presentation or a job interview, you need to anticipate what kinds of questions your audience or interviewer may ask, so when writing your essay you should take into account both sides of the issue. **TSIS** refers to this practice as "planting a naysayer in your text." Another way of describing this is acknowledging and responding to a counterargument. If you don't, your readers may think that you are not aware of other viewpoints, or that you are trying to avoid mentioning them. By acknowledging that some readers may disagree, you show that you are informed, fair, and (hopefully) unbiased. Of course, after conceding that part of the opposing argument is at least worth considering, you should nevertheless continue to assert your own claim and to show why it is preferable to the alternative argument.

For example:

While I concede that in his later career Alexander Hamilton advocated military intervention on several occasions, I continue to assert that his overall approach to foreign affairs was dominated by the policy of neutrality.

Explaining the Importance of the Discussion

Graff and Birkenstein remind students of a critical point that sometimes gets overlooked in writing: explaining why the issue under discussion is important, and why the reader should pay attention. The best way to do this is to point out explicitly how the issue is relevant and has real-life implications for the reader as an individual, a citizen, etc. Even if you care deeply about a topic, your audience may lose interest if you don't get them engaged in the discussion or get them to feel invested in the outcome.

Video 3: Making Your Writing More Cohesive and Engaging

Using Transitions to Connect Your Ideas:

When you write an essay, you want to arrange your ideas in a logical pattern that flows smoothly and meaningfully from one sentence to the next, and that links one paragraph to the next. You can do this with the help of transition words. Use transitions to add more information (e.g. also, in addition, furthermore); to elaborate on a point (in other words, actually, to put it succinctly); to provide an example (for instance, specifically, as an illustration); to show cause and effect (as a result, therefore, thus); to make a comparison or contrast (likewise, in contrast, on the contrary); to concede a point (granted, admittedly, to be sure); and to make a conclusion (in sum, as a result, in conclusion); etc.

Considering When to Use Formal and Informal Discourse

While academic writing is by definition more formal than oral conversation, it should still flow naturally. Don't feel obliged to use long complex sentences or extravagant vocabulary in order to impress your audience: this usually ends up backfiring, as it seems forced and artificial. While you definitely want to expand your active vocabulary and add variety to your writing style, don't try to change everything at once: Use words and sentence structures that you feel comfortable with. In addition, you should consider the **register**, or level of formality vs. informality, of the source you are responding to. If the book or article focuses on a less formal topic, and especially if it uses informal style, you should feel free to do the same. For example, an essay on snowboarding or videogames will most likely include more everyday vocabulary and be written in a more informal style than, say, an analysis of a philosophical work. However, you may also consider mixing styles, depending on your audience: For instance, you could try to make the philosophical work accessible to a wider audience by using simpler vocabulary; and the discussion of videogames could become very serious if it deals with copyright issues. An excellent example of the use of multiple registers appears at the end of **TSIS**, in the article "Don't Blame the Eater," by David Zinczenko. It addresses the very serious issue of childhood obesity, but it is filled with slang expressions, informal idioms, and references to pop culture.

Clarifying Your Ideas by Restating Them in Different Ways (Metacommentary)

People absorb information in a variety of ways. For some, a summary or outline makes most sense. The scientifically-minded may prefer data and statistics, while others find anecdotes and personal stories more engaging. Illustrations or graphs are yet another way of conveying information. As you compose your essays, you should consider various ways of getting your ideas across to your audience. The term **metacommentary** means commenting on a comment, or explaining a concept in other words. Your goal in writing is to communicate as clearly as possible and to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding on the reader's part. For example: "My purpose in this essay is not to preach to the choir, but to convince skeptics of my view." As Graff and Birkenstein note, writers often employ metacommentary in the titles of books and articles in order to attract the reader's attention, using a catchy phrase as the title and adding an explanatory subtitle. For example, in the book title, *The Great Divide: The Conflict Between*

Washington and Jefferson That Defined a Nation, author Thomas Fleming borrows a term that refers to the Continental Divide (roughly corresponding to the Rocky Mountains) as a metaphor to grab the audience's attention. The subtitle then succinctly explains that the book is actually a study of the conflicting political philosophies of the first US President, George Washington, and his Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson (later the 3rd President), and the consequences that this dispute had for the future of the young country. Thus, Fleming employs a good hook and says a lot in a few words with the help of metacommentary.

Video 4: *Applying TSIS Methods to Specific Academic Contexts*

Classroom Discussions, Digital Communication, and Critical Thinking

Now that you have a good sense of what the **TSIS** method consists of, you can apply it to a variety of academic contexts, including classroom discussions, digital communication, and critical thinking.

- First, since the **TSIS** method recommends that you think about academic writing as a form of conversation, you can apply **TSIS** writing techniques to the classroom setting, using similar templates to agree or disagree with a previous speaker; to add more information; to change the topic of discussion, etc.
- Second, in the case of digital communication, you can think of e-mail like any other tool: the tool itself is neutral, neither necessarily good nor necessarily bad. The result of its use depends on the user. E-mail is an essential part of both social and academic life, but despite the Internet's tendency to promote informality and deemphasize grammar and style, it is important to write clearly and carefully; to provide proper context; to consider your audience; and to anticipate and avoid possible misunderstandings.
- Third, and finally, when examining a text, it is critical not only to understand exactly what side the author is on, but also to know the context in which he/she was writing. Just as you are writing your essay in response to a given book or article, that source's author may be responding to an earlier written source, to a dramatic event, etc. The author you read may strive to be impartial or may overtly represent a specific political party, religion, or ideology. Being aware of an author's open or hidden agenda or bias will help you respond more thoughtfully and critically to that source.

Applying TSIS Methods to Specific Academic Contexts (continued): Writing about Literature, the Sciences, and the Social Sciences

The various chapters of **TSIS** that we have been discussing thus far provide templates that can be applied to a broad range of disciplines. The final chapters of the textbook focus specifically on writing about Literature, the Sciences, and the Social Sciences. You will find templates for responding to novels, poems, and other literary works, when you are asked questions about the deeper meaning of the work; the identity of the narrator; conflicts within the work; which side the narrator or text favors; and your own interpretation of the text. When writing in the Sciences, you may be asked to follow a certain structure, namely: Start with the data; present the prevailing theories; explain the methods; summarize the findings; explain what the data

mean; make your own arguments; explain where you agree or disagree with previous work; and indicate why the research is significant. When writing in the Social Sciences, you will often do the following: Begin with an introduction that challenges or modifies existing work; include a review of the literature; provide analysis of data; deal with possible objections; and explain the significance of the research.

List of References:

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 2017. **(TSIS)**