They Say I Say

The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing

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The book "They Say I Say" includes four parts further split into *17 chapters*. The book is aimed at authors becoming better writers. At a deeper level, it invites authors to become a particular type of person: a critical, intellectual thinker who, instead of sitting passively on the side-lines, can participate in the debates and conversations of your world in an active and empowered way. The most distinctive feature of this book is its presentation of many such templates, designed to help authors successfully enter the world of academic thinking and writing and the broader worlds of civic discourse and work.

Part 1. The first part of this book discusses the "they say" stage of writing, in which you devote your attention to the views of some other person or group. Chapter 1 emphasizes the need to highlight what other researchers and what "they say" as soon as you can in your text and remind readers of it at strategic points as your text unfolds. Even when presenting your claims, you should keep returning to the motivating "they say." The longer and more complicated your text, the greater the chance readers will forget what ideas originally motivated it—no matter how you lay them out at the beginning. *Chapter 2* stresses the art of summarizing. Writing a good summary means not just representing an author's view accurately but doing so in a way that fits your own composition's larger agenda. The book authors have argued that, as a general rule, good summaries require a balance between what someone else has said and your interests as a writer. *Chapter 3* discusses the art of quoting. The book authors state that quotations are orphans: words that have been taken from their original contexts and that need to be integrated into their new textual surroundings. This chapter offers two key ways to produce this sort of integration: (1) by choosing quotations wisely, with an eye to how well they support a particular part of your text, and (2) by surrounding every significant quotation with a frame explaining whose words they are, what the quotation means, and how the quotation relates to your text

Part 2. *Chapter 4* explains that when writers take too long to declare their position relative to views of other researchers they have summarized or quoted, readers get frustrated. The book authors suggest that, whether you are agreeing, disagreeing, or both agreeing and disagreeing, you need to be as straightforward as possible. *Chapter 5* educates readers on noticing subtle markers that good writers leave in their articles. With texts that present an authentic dialogue of perspectives, readers need to be alert to the often-subtle markers that indicate whose voice the writer is speaking in. *Chapter 6* provides templates and argues that when writers make the best case for their critics, they bolster their credibility with readers rather than undermine it. *Chapter 7* focuses on various moves that one can make to answer the "who cares?" and "so what?" questions in your writing. If a writer takes it for granted that readers will somehow intuit the answers to "so what?" and "who cares?" on their own, you may make your work seem less attractive than it is. You run the risk that readers will dismiss your text as irrelevant and unimportant.

Part 3. *Chapter 8* focuses on transitions offers several strategies a writer can use to put into action: (1) using transition terms; (2) adding pointing words; (3) developing a set of key terms and phrases for each text you write; and (4) repeating yourself, but with a difference—a move that involves repeating what you've said, but with enough variation to avoid being redundant. *Chapter 9* stresses that a writer does not need to use big words, long sentences, and complex sentence structures to impress the editors. Your judgments about appropriate language for the

situation should always consider your likely audience and your purpose in writing. *Chapter 10* is devoted to the art of metacommentary. Metacommentary is a way of commenting on your claims and telling others how—and how not—to think about them. *Chapter 11* stresses an important aspect related to revisions. This chapter provides a list of guidelines that offers help and points you back to relevant advice and templates in this book.

Part 4. Chapter 12 focuses on issues faced in classroom discussions. The principles in this chapter can help improve class discussions, which increasingly include various forms of online communication. In oral discussions about complicated issues that are open to multiple interpretations, we usually need to re-summarize what others have said to make sure that everyone is on the same page. *Chapter 13* focuses on digital communication since it provides a mountain of information we have at our fingertips. The book authors argue that digital technologies make writers less able to sustain a "big idea" in an article and more prone to write in "little bursts and snippets". *Chapter 14* guides us on understanding what motivates the writer of a research article. Is the writer responding to more than one argument? This chapter looks at an argument not in isolation but as connected arguments. *Chapter 15* helps us understand how to look for conflicts or debates in literary works. *Chapter 16* is focused on writing in the sciences. It is crucial to explain the methods used to collect data and summarize your findings. Though individual studies can be narrowly focused, science seeks to answer big questions and produce valuable technologies. Writing about science presents the opportunity to add your arguments to the ongoing discussion. *Chapter 17*, the last chapter, is focused on social science by providing various example which stress that it is essential to consider how your research affects the reader's assumptions about human behaviour.

About the Editors

GERALD GRAFF, a Professor of English and Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago and 2008 President of the Modern Language Association of America, has had a significant impact on teachers through such books as Professing Literature: An Institutional History, Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education, and, most recently, Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind.

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