

BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE: RESPONDING TO OTHERS (“THEY SAY/I SAY”)

PURPOSE: In this exercise, you will go beyond simple agreement or disagreement. Instead of treating these authors as *authorities* to invoke (or contradict), learn to engage with them as if they are people you are having a conversation with. In conversations, it is only polite to *acknowledge* when another participant makes a good point before *responding*.

TASK: On a piece of paper, draw two columns. Label one side “Acknowledgement: [Author] Says” and the other side “Response: I Say.” (Use the name of the author you have chosen!) In order to fill up the first side of the column:

1. Find something the author says that you agree with strongly.
2. Find something the author says that you disagree with strongly.
3. Find something the author says that you partially agree with but partially disagree with.
4. Find something the author says that you have a question or mixed feelings about. Perhaps you’re not sure yet whether you agree or disagree.
5. Find something the author says that you agree with, but where she doesn’t argue strongly enough, contradicts herself, or doesn’t provide the best evidence.

Now you can fill up the “I Say” side of the column with your responses to what your chosen author says. What are your reasons for agreeing, disagreeing, partially agreeing/disagreeing, or questioning the author’s claims? Are there times when you agree with a point or assertion, but you think the author doesn’t argue it as persuasively as you could?

As you fill in the columns, use some of these verbs to restate what the author says in academic language: *claims, argues, suggests, implies, assumes, thinks, insists, maintains, views, demonstrates, believes*

- Note that these words are not simple synonyms; they are “signal verbs” that each have different connotations. In what context would you say that the author “assumes” something, and when would you say she “insists” on something? What’s the difference? Use your dictionary if you need to.
- Check the index of your handbook (*Rules for Writers*, etc.) or *They Say/I Say* for lists of signal verbs and refer to those as well.

Next, choose some words from the above list to articulate your responses. You may also find these additional words and phrases useful in formulating your responses to the author and launching your own claims: *while, respond, counter, add, on the one hand/on the other hand, agree, disagree, object, reply, concede, share, skeptical, sympathize, in contrast*

- For example: *While I concede Bettelheim's claim that the hunter represents Little Red Cap's father, he provides insufficient evidence to demonstrate that her desire for rescue is motivated by her unresolved Oedipal complex. Instead, I suggest...*
- See *They Say/I Say* for more templates for agreeing, disagreeing, or falling somewhere in between. Kate Turabian also offers templates along these lines.

You are the author of your paper, writing formally to an audience that shares your knowledge base of our course topic. Use "I" in this exercise, and when you write your paper, use "I" to frame your arguments.

- However, overuse of the pronoun "I" becomes a problem if you weaken your claims by framing them as statements of personal feelings or belief. Avoid the kind of language you might use informally in a reading response such as ~~I feel, I believe, I personally think, when I was reading this story I thought...~~
- Instead, use verbs that signal your positions as claims: I argue, I am skeptical, I sympathize with...

This is a brainstorming exercise, which means that it's likely that most of what you come up with won't make it into your paper. That's okay! That's just part of brainstorming. Keep what works for your paper and discard the rest.