

Writing Technique: *They Say, I Say*

Summary and response

Purpose

This writing technique is an important way to approach non-fiction texts. It allows the student to both summarize the information and respond to it. It is one of the steps towards writing a synthesis essay, which is argumentative, not persuasive.

You will see synthesis essay questions in all disciplines in college. This technique will help you to create a template for these types of responses.

Sample Synthesis Prompts

ZOOLOGY

- Describe three functions of proteins in the bodies of animals, giving an example of each function.
- Define and differentiate the concept of "hypothesis" and "theory" as used in science.
- Describe two ways in which the digestive tract of mammals protects itself against being digested by the powerful digestive enzymes.

HISTORY

- Explain who two political parties (Federalist and Republican) formed so soon after the creation of the republic in 1789. Be specific.
- Briefly discuss the major social and religious ideas of the Puritans who settled at Massachusetts Bay.

Writing a Summary (*They Say*)

1. Read the text for its main points.
2. Identify the text's major divisions or chunks.
3. Try summarizing each division in one or two sentences.
4. Finally, combine summaries of the parts into a coherent whole.

What Are Your Thoughts? (I Say)

- Once you're clear on what the text says, you need to decide how you feel.
- Agree, Disagree, or some combination of both.
- Why do you feel this way? What support can you provide?

Distinguishing Yourself

As you write your thoughts, imagine what the other side might have to say against your argument as it unfolds.

This will engage the reader in a debate and distinguish your ideas.

Using Templates

- When crafting your point of view on an issue, using a template may make your ideas clearer.
- For Example:
 - I disagree with X's view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.
 - By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of _____.
 - X's theory of _____ is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of _____.

Connecting the Parts

- When you write a sentence, it may help to think of each sentence you write as having arms that reach backward and forward.
- When your sentences reach outward, they establish connections that help your writing flow smoothly in a way that readers appreciate.
- One way to do this is by using transition phrases to link your ideas together.

Connecting the Parts, cont.

- Repeat key terms and phrases.
- Repeat yourself---but with a difference.
Try to build bridges between your ideas by echoing what you have just said while simultaneously moving your text into new territory.

They Say, I Say Format

- 1st portion: “They Say” is a summary of the main points of the text.
- 2nd portion: “I Say” is your personal response to the text. Do you agree or disagree or both? And why?