

Starter Phrases for Academic Writing

Across the academic disciplines, writers often introduce their ideas, or the ideas of others, with simple phrases. You can use the phrases in this handout to achieve your rhetorical purpose.

Meta-language that signals a text's organization

- Arguments against phenomenon X depend on four assumptions:
- The perspective that informs most research on X is...
- I would like to discuss two alternatives and their implications...
- This paper will investigate X and propose four solutions/explanations...
- This paper addresses the limitations of Y...

Language that shows agreement

- There is strong convergent evidence for....
- Research seems to agree that....
- X supports *or* extend Y's finding....
- We find support for this hypothesis/theory in....
- Our data support *or* confirm *or* verify the work of X by showing that X...

Language that shows disagreement or limitations

- The research on X is mixed....
- There is debate over....
- Despite X, our findings suggest Y...
- X's findings call into question *or* refute Y...
- While X found Y, these findings may be limited on the grounds that X's experimental design was...
- While X found Y, these findings cannot be extended to Z...

Note: Avoid using words like “failed” or “ignored” when critiquing other researchers. Instead, frame your contribution in positive terms: “While X pioneered the field of Y, my work contributes X...”

Language that suggests a connection

- As a consequence of X, Y...
- In the absence *or* presence of X, Y...
- To see whether these findings apply to X, we propose Y...
- Research demonstrating X has led scientists to propose Y...

This handout was adapted from:

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Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. 2nd Ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010. Print.