

DISTINGUISHING VOICE

Effective academic writing requires entering into dialogue with others. Because of this, it is crucial that “readers be able to tell [...] when you are expressing your own view and when you are expressing someone else’s” (Graff & Birkenstein, 2017, p. 68).

Helpful tip: Try to take notice of voice markers when you read, as voice markers are also critical to reading comprehension.

NOTE: For help avoiding writing in the first person, consult Academic Coaching’s resources on [active voice](#), [scholarly tone](#), [ghostwriting](#), and [flesh-and-blood characters](#).

HOW TO DISTINGUISH YOUR VOICE

Several **rhetorical moves** and “**voice-identifying devices**” can help you set your voice apart from others (Graff & Birkenstein, 2017, pp. 68-69, 71).

1. **Insert “voice markers”** – voice markers are direct signals that alert readers to who is speaking in your writing (Graff & Birkenstein, 2017, pp. 68-72).
 - a. Voice markers provide clues to help readers distinguish different perspectives within a text (Lewitzki, 2017).
 - b. Sentences with voice markers directly reference authors and their claims.
 - c. You can indicate that you are summarizing what another author says by introducing statements with phrases like “he says” or “the essay concludes” (Bullock & Weinberg, 2016, p. 34).
2. **Embed references** – indicate the speaker by weaving references into your own sentences (Graff & Birkenstein, 2017, pp. 73-75).
 - a. Embedding references allows you to refer to other perspectives with minimal disruption to the structure of the sentence (p. 74).
 - b. When embedding voice markers, you state your own point while also referencing what another author said (Lewitzki, 2017).
 - c. Embedded references are less direct - they refer to the author’s claims but may not explicitly mention the author.
 - i. Always be sure to provide citations when referencing another person’s ideas.
 - d. Besides distinguishing the speaker, this strategy helps you maintain flow in your writing.

3. **Enter the conversation** – present your ideas on the topic in response to other scholars (Bullock & Weinberg, 2016, p. 4).
 - a. “Begin by quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing what others have said and then agree, disagree, or both” (p. 4).

EXAMPLES:

What they say vs. what you say

Distinguishing the speaker using signals:

- In *They Say, I Say*, the authors argue that it is common for academics to use the first person in their writing (Graff & Birkenstein, 2017, p. 73). However, students should always consult their professors before straying from the third person voice in their scholarly writing.
 - In this example, the authors’ claims are directly referenced and summarized.
 - The word “however” signals a new perspective because the writer (you) adds nuance to the ideas initially presented by Graff and Birkenstein.
- While A. Smith and B. Smith (2022) rightly state that kittens are cute, they overlook a crucial point: puppies are also adorable.
 - This example directly references the authors and their claims.
 - You enter the conversation by referring to A. Smith and B. Smith’s statement, pointing out a deficiency in their argument, and then adding your own point.

Embedding voice markers:

- Sometimes it is easier to distinguish voice using signal phrases as demonstrated above, but with practice, one can successfully embed voice markers in one’s academic writing (Graff & Birkenstein, 2017).
 - “As demonstrated above” refers to an argument you referenced earlier in your text.

Conversing with readers:

- In *The Women of the Bible Speak*, Bream (2021) explores the divine love that God presents to the downtrodden, writing, “Leah the unloved becomes the beloved of God, and her rejection by her husband becomes the occasion of her abundant blessing” (p. 45). God’s love is further evidenced in the fact that Jesus is a descendant of Judah, one of Leah’s sons (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/2022, Matthew 1:2; Luke 3:33-34).

- In this example, the writer directly engages with the source by responding to Bream's words. This continues the conversation by pointing the reader to another point or presenting an original idea.

References

Bream, S. (2021). *The women of the Bible speak: The wisdom of 16 women and their lessons for today*. Fox News Books.

Bullock, R., & Weinberg, F. (2016). *The Norton field guide to writing with handbook* (4th ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C. (2017). "And yet": Distinguishing what you say from what they say. *They Say / I Say* (3rd ed., pp. 68-77). W. W. Norton & Company.

Lewitzki, R. (2017, April 7). *Chapter 5: Distinguishing what you say from what they say*. [PowerPoint slides]. SlideShare.
<https://www.slideshare.net/rlewitzki/they-say-i-say-chapter-5>

New American Standard Bible. (2022). Holman Bibles. (Original work published 1971)

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