

Another classic way to agree and disagree at the same time is to make what we call an “I’m of two minds” or a “mixed feelings” move.

- ▶ I’m of two minds about X’s claim that On the one hand, I agree that On the other hand, I’m not sure if
- ▶ My feelings on the issue are mixed. I do support X’s position that , but I find Y’s argument about and Z’s research on to be equally persuasive.

This move can be especially useful if you are responding to new or particularly challenging work and are as yet unsure where you stand. It also lends itself well to the kind of speculative investigation in which you weigh a position’s pros and cons rather than come out decisively either for or against. But again, as we suggest earlier, whether you are agreeing, disagreeing, or both agreeing and disagreeing, you need to be as clear as possible, and making a frank statement that you are ambivalent is one way to be clear.

Nevertheless, many writers are as reluctant to express ambivalence as they are to disagree or agree. Some may worry that by expressing ambivalence they will come across as evasive, wishy-washy, or unsure of themselves. Or they may think that their ambivalence will end up confusing readers who require clear-cut statements. In fact, however, expressing ambivalent feelings can serve to demonstrate deep sophistication as a writer. There is nothing wrong with forthrightly declaring that you have mixed feelings, especially after you’ve considered various options. Indeed, although you never want to be merely evasive, leaving your ambivalence thoughtfully

FOUR “YES / NO / OKAY, BUT”

and no”; on the one hand I agree, on the other I disagree”—enables readers to place your argument on that map of positions we spoke of earlier while still keeping your argument sufficiently complex.

Another aspect we like about this option is that it can be tipped subtly toward agreement or disagreement, depending on where you lay your stress. If you want to stress the disagreement end of the spectrum, you would use a template like the one below.

- ▶ Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that

Conversely, if you want to stress your agreement more than your disagreement, you would use a template like this one.

- ▶ Although I disagree with much that X says, I fully endorse his final conclusion that

The first template above might be called a “yes, but . . .” move, the second a “no, but . . .” move. Other versions include the following.

- ▶ Though I concede that, I still insist that
- ▶ X is right that, but she seems on more dubious ground when she claims that
- ▶ While X is probably wrong when she claims that, she is right that
- ▶ Whereas X provides ample evidence that, Y and Z’s research on and convinces me that instead.