



Signal Phrases

What are signal phrases?

Signal phrases are short phrases that introduce a quote, paraphrase, or summary; they signal to readers that an outside source is being used.

A signal phrase introducing a quote:

The CEO of Lighthouse Consulting predicts “a year of exciting, challenging endeavors that will expand the company’s horizons and stimulate growth throughout the company.”

A signal phrase introducing a paraphrase:

According to a recent survey from Pew Research Center, more than 50% of adults in the U.S. play video games, with 21% engaging in this activity on a daily basis.

A signal phrase introducing a summary:

The nutritionists Young and Robinson propose that an iron-fortified soy sauce is the solution to the anemia problem in the young women of rural China.

Why do we use them?

There are three important reasons to use signal phrases:

1. To mark boundaries: Signal phrases mark boundaries between your words and the source's words. By marking the boundaries, you also provide a smooth transition for the reader between your words and the source.
2. To emphasize the source: Signal phrases call attention to the author or source being used. In some cases, such as a literature review or the use of a well-known author, specific information about the source is important for the reader to know.
3. To avoid plagiarism: All source material must be cited, and signal phrases are one way to cite a source—however, additional citation formatting may be necessary depending on your citation style.

How can I use them?

Below are some guidelines and tips for using signal phrases.

- Signal phrases usually include the author's name but can also include the author's job title or background ("reporter for Washington Post," "researcher," "senator," "scholar," and so on) and/or the title of the source.
- Signal phrases usually come at the beginning of a sentence before the source material, but they can also occur in the middle of a source or at the end.
- To avoid monotony and repetition, try to vary both the language and placement of your signal phrases.

According to Maxwell and Hanson, ...

As the 2017 IRS report indicates, ...

Smith and Johnson state that ...

Some scholars have shown...

Legal scholar Terrence Roberts offered a persuasive argument: "..."

- Choose a verb that is appropriate to the way you are using your source. Below is a list of verbs that can be used in signal phrases:

acknowledges adds admits affirms agrees answers argues asserts claims
comments concedes confirms contends counters counterattacks declares defines
denies disputes echoes endorses estimates finds grants illustrates implies insists
mentions notes observes predicts proposes reasons recognizes recommends

refutes rejects reports responds reveals speculates states suggests surmises warns
writes

*Adapted from A Writer's Reference with Writing in the Disciplines 7th ed. by Diana Hacker and
Nancy Sommers*