

Signal Phrases and Verbs

Signal Phrases

Like a blinking arrow sign on the side of a highway that tells drivers the right lane is closed up ahead, signal phrases in an academic essay notify your readers that quotes or paraphrases are approaching. With signal phrases, readers are not surprised by quotes or paraphrases that are randomly dropped into paragraphs. According to *A Writer's Reference*, "A signal phrase usually names the author of the source, provides some context for the source material . . . and helps readers distinguish your ideas from those of the source" (pp. 154-55). It usually appears before the source material, although not always. The information you include (or exclude) from your signal phrases determines what needs to go in the corresponding in-text citations.

Here are some guidelines for crafting signal phrases. For more detailed information, refer to *A Writer's Reference*, pp. pp. 154-59.

1. If you are using an **author's name in a signal phrase**, give the person's full name the *first* time you cite that author. Use only the author's last name in subsequent signal phrases. This is true whether you have one author or multiple authors.
2. If there are **two authors**, name both in the signal phrase. If there are **three or more authors**, you can include only the first author's name followed by "et al." or simply put the title of the source in the signal phrase and the authors' names in the in-text citation.
3. In a case where there is **no author given**, use either the name of the organization that published the information or the title of the periodical, website, or book in which it appears.
4. In a case where there are **no page numbers** given in the source, use a detailed signal phrase followed by a general in-text citation.
5. Here are some additional examples of signal phrases:
 - Similarly, Judith K. Powers emphasizes that . . .
 - Marsden, Colwell, and Johnson agree that . . . OR Marsden and others agree that . . .
 - Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mary Oliver writes, in her poem "Wild Geese," . . .
 - Even though Shakespearean scholar Robert B. Schwartz argues that Hamlet . . .
 - According to the National Institute of Mental Health, . . .

As you can see from these examples, you can use signal phrases to describe the authors of your sources, which can lend credibility to them and to your essay. You can also show whether you agree or disagree with the sources you are citing, which emphasizes the point you are making.

Also see the Blinn College – Bryan Writing Center's "Sentence Templates" handout.

Signal Verbs

Signal phrase verbs do just that – signal or indicate that the writer is quoting, paraphrasing, or referring to another source. The most common, “says,” is often overused. The following list of verbs offers more interesting ways to show that you are citing someone else’s opinions or information found elsewhere.

These verbs are also more specific, defining more clearly the writer’s implied meaning. Be attentive to each verb’s distinctions. Is the author agreeing with the cited material, explaining an idea, supporting a claim, providing background, or lending authority?

While some signal phrase verbs are relatively objective, others carry more emotional weight and should be used with care. For example:

More objective: illustrates, indicates, states, suggests

More weighted: charges, complains, asserts, insinuates

General list of signal phrase verbs:

accepts	accounts for	acknowledges	addresses	adds	admits
advises	affirms	agrees	alleges	allows	analyzes
answers	argues	asks	asserts	assumes	believes
categorizes	challenges	charges	cites	claims	comments
compares	complains	concedes	concludes	concur	confesses
confirms	considers	contends	criticizes	deals with	decides
declares	defines	denies	describes	disagrees	discusses
disputes	emphasizes	endorses	explains	expresses	finds
grants	hypothesizes	illustrates	implies	indicates	insinuates
insists	interprets	introduces	lists	maintains	mentions
notes	objects	observes	offers	opposes	points out
proposes	questions	realizes	reasons	refutes	rejects
remarks	replies	reports	responds	reveals	sees
shows	speculates	states	supports	supposes	thinks
uses	utilizes	verifies	writes		

See also:

- The Blinn College – Bryan Writing Center’s “Sentence Templates” handout.
- *A Writer’s Reference*, p. 155.