

Signal Phrases

Using Signal Phrases to Integrate Source Material

Resource: *The OWL at Purdue* website and *The LB Brief Handbook*, 5th edition

- A **signal phrase** is a phrase, clause, or sentence that leads into a quotation or statistic. These phrases generally include the speaker/author's name and some justification for using him or her as an expert in this context; they may also help establish the context for the quotation.
- It is necessary not only to cite all sources but also to make clear which information comes from you and which comes from a source. Signal phrases help to introduce material borrowed from a reference.

Creating a Signal Phrase

- **Avoid dropping quotations into your writing without warning; instead, provide clear *signal phrases*, such as “According to Williams,” to prepare readers for the source material.**
 - **Example without signal phrase:**
 - Although the bald eagle is still listed as an endangered species, its ever increasing population is very encouraging. “The bald eagle seems to have stabilized its population, at the very least, almost everywhere” (Sheppard 83).
 - **Example with signal phrase:**
 - Although the bald eagle is still listed as an endangered species, its ever increasing population is very encouraging. According to ornithologist Jay Sheppard, “The bald eagle seems to have stabilized its population, at the very least, almost everywhere” (83).
- **Establish the source's credibility.**
 - Signal phrases should let the reader know 1) who is speaking and 2) how they are speaking.
 - Notice in the above example that the signal phrase includes a noun (*ornithologist*) that describes Sheppard's occupation. Readers want to know his or her credentials or area of expertise in addition to his or her name. Establishing the credibility of your source adds credibility to *you* as a writer.
- **Try to vary your signal phrases to avoid monotony.**



APSU Writing Center

Signal Phrases

- **Examples of signal phrases:**
 - In the words of researcher Herbert Terrace, “. . .” (37).
 - Radio host Tom Magliozzi offer a persuasive counterargument: “. . .” (17). Anthropologist Flora Davis has noted that . . . (22).
 - Washoe’s trainers, the Gardners, assert, “. . .” (13).
 - Psychologist H.S. Terrace offers this argument: “. . .” (92).
 - In the words of researchers Redelmeir and Tibshirmani, “. . .”
 - Patti Pena, mother of a child killed by a driver distracted by a cell phone, points out that “. . .”
 - “(insert the quote),” writes Christine Haughney,
 - “(continue quote) . . .” “(insert quote) . . .,” claims wireless spokesperson Annette Jacobs.

- **When continuing to use material from the same source within a paragraph, indicate that by using appropriate signal phrases and transitions:**
 - Smith goes on to say . . .
 - Miller continues, pointing out that . . .
 - The study also found . . .

- **Verbs to Use in Signal Phrases**
 - Signal phrases often incorporate verbs or verb phrases. The verb needs to fit the context, such as whether the source claims, argues, observes, concludes, refutes, or states. The following list of verbs will help you think about ways to incorporate source material into your writing; just be sure your selection fits the context.
 - Acknowledges ■ Confirms ■ Highlights ■ Reasons
 - Adds ■ Contends ■ Hypothesizes ■ Recounts
 - Admits ■ Contrasts ■ Illustrates ■ Reflects
 - Advances ■ Creates ■ Implies ■ Refutes
 - Affirms ■ Declares ■ Indicates ■ Reiterates
 - Agrees ■ Emphasizes ■ Insists ■ Relates
 - Alludes ■ Defines ■ Maintains ■ Remarks
 - Argues ■ Delineates ■ Narrates ■ Replies
 - Asserts ■ Denies ■ Negates ■ Reports
 - Attests ■ Discloses ■ Notes ■ Responds
 - Characterizes ■ Discounts ■ Observes ■ Reveals
 - Chronicles ■ Disputes ■ Refers ■ States
 - Claims ■ Documents ■ Points out ■ Submits
 - Comments ■ Explains ■ Posits ■ Suggests
 - Compares ■ Expresses ■ Presents ■ Supports
 - Concludes ■ Extrapolates ■ Proposes ■ Theorizes
 - Concurs ■ Grants ■ Purports ■ Writes
 - Verifies