



Using Signal Phrases Effectively

We see **signal phrases** in news stories all the time when journalists credit their sources. Academics use them, too, in combination with proper citations. As defined by [Purdue](#), a **signal phrase** is “a word or words that introduce information from someone else. ... The word or words ‘signal’ to the reader that the writer is using someone else’s ideas.”

Signal phrases are great tools for introducing sources. They can also be used in lieu of traditional citations to indicate continued use of a recently cited source. A signal phrase can be as short as a name, or could include a description of the source. For example:

- According to [Author Name]...
- The [Organization Name] study shows...
- As described in [Book Title]...
- In [“Article Title”], the author explains...
- Their research illustrates that...
- [Author Name] examined...
- The article suggests that...
- As noted on their website...

Why Use Signal Phrases? Signal phrases improve the flow of your writing and can provide important details about the source that aren’t revealed in the citation itself. They can also prevent your paragraph text from becoming cluttered with repeated footnotes or parenthetical citations, while still clarifying the source of the information.

Rules: When using signal phrases, first provide your reader with a full citation for the source, which should appear the first time the source is used in the paragraph. Remember to indicate the page number for direct quotes. After inserting your own analysis, use a signal phrase to clarify that you are returning to a recently cited source’s analysis or data.

Example Signal Phrases in Chicago, APA, and IEEE Citation Styles

Signal phrases are highlighted in yellow.

Chicago Notes and Bibliography	Chicago Author-Date
In a <i>Journal of Restaurant Marketing</i> article, restaurateur John Kramer contends that dining areas decorated in red and yellow provoke feelings of hunger. ¹ Consider popular fast-food chains, which often use these colors in their advertising and décor. Kramer asserts that restaurant customers feel more energized in red and yellow environments, which encourages them to order more food. Patrons feel more relaxed in blue and purple environments, Kramer explains, which leads them to “spend more time considering the menu options and eat at a slower pace.” ² Accordingly, it is difficult to identify a popular chain restaurant that decorates with calmer hues.	According to John Kramer’s 2009 <i>Journal of Restaurant Marketing</i> article, dining areas decorated in red and yellow provoke feelings of hunger. Consider popular fast-food chains, which often use these colors in their advertising and décor. Kramer found that restaurant customers felt more energized in red and yellow environments, which encouraged them to order more food. He also determined that patrons felt relaxed in blue and purple environments, which led them to “spend more time considering the menu options and eat at a slower pace” (29). Accordingly, it is difficult to identify a popular chain restaurant that decorates with calmer hues.
APA	IEEE
As revealed in a 2009 <i>Journal of Restaurant Marketing</i> article by John Kramer, dining areas decorated in red and yellow provoke feelings of hunger. Consider popular fast-food chains, which often use these colors in their advertising and décor. During his research, Kramer discovered that restaurant customers felt more energized in red and yellow environments, which encouraged them to order more food. He further noted that patrons felt relaxed in blue and purple environments, which led them to “spend more time considering the menu options and eat at a slower pace” (p. 29). Accordingly, it is difficult to identify a popular chain restaurant that decorates with calmer hues.	In [1], restaurateur John Kramer shows that dining areas decorated in red and yellow provoke feelings of hunger. Consider popular fast-food chains, which often use these colors in their advertising and décor. In Kramer’s study, restaurant customers felt more energized in red and yellow environments, which encouraged them to order more food. The study also indicated that patrons felt relaxed in blue and purple environments, which led them to “spend more time considering the menu options and eat at a slower pace” [1]. Accordingly, it is difficult to identify a popular chain restaurant that decorates with calmer hues.



Choosing Signal Phrase Verbs

Stuck in a signal phrase rut? Here are some verb options to choose from. By varying your signal-phrase verbs, your writing can be more accurate and explanatory.

The basic format is: *[Source Name]* **[signal phrase verb]** that...*

For example: *Khan* **states** that...

*The use of “that” tells the reader that the entire following clause is the object of the signal phrase verb.

<p style="text-align: center;">Says</p> <p><i>The verb introduces the quotation as information.</i></p> <p>adds mentions believes notes clarifies observes comments offers describes points out discusses remarks emphasizes reports examines reveals explains says explores states identifies writes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Agrees</p> <p><i>The verb indicates that the source agrees with another source or with the position you are advancing.</i></p> <p>accepts agrees assents concur parallels supports</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Yields</p> <p><i>The source agrees that a conflicting point is valid.</i></p> <p>acknowledges admits agrees allows concedes grants recognizes</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Argues in favor</p> <p><i>The verb indicates that the source is providing evidence or reasons for a position.</i></p> <p>argues indicates asserts insists contends maintains demonstrates proposes holds recommends illustrates shows</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Argues against</p> <p><i>The verb indicates that the source is providing evidence against a position.</i></p> <p>attacks disputes contradicts objects criticizes opposes denies rebuts differs refutes disagrees</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">States controversially</p> <p><i>The source makes a statement that you are skeptical about (be careful of your tone if you use these).</i></p> <p>alleges assumes claims purports</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Implies</p> <p><i>The source presents information either tentatively or indirectly.</i></p> <p>implies insinuates proposes suggests</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Continues</p> <p><i>You continue to refer to or quote the source.</i></p> <p>adds also notes continues goes on to say states further</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Concludes</p> <p><i>The source draws a conclusion from previous discussion.</i></p> <p>concludes decides determines finds</p>

Adapted from Robert A. Harris, *Using Sources Effectively: Strengthening Your Writing and Avoiding Plagiarism*, 3rd edition (Glendale, CA: Pyczak Publishing, 2001), 47.



Using Sentence Flow, Not Repeated Citations

When a source is properly introduced and continuously discussed throughout a paragraph, repeated citations or signal phrases may not be needed; your sentence flow alone can signal continued use of a previously cited source.

The paragraph below shows how to introduce a source with a signal phrase and then use sentence flow to indicate continued use of the same source. Three signal phrases are used, highlighted in yellow. Between these, word choices, highlighted in blue, let the reader know the same source is still being used. The necessary citation information to supplement the signal phrases (shown in APA style) is highlighted in green—note that a page number citation is needed after the direct quotation.

Sentence Flow with Signal Phrases
<p>On Purdue’s popular Online Writing Lab website (n.d.), the university highlights the value of paraphrasing source material. There are several steps, the site suggests, to achieving an effectively paraphrased passage. First, read through the source’s passage for comprehension—without first truly understanding the information, paraphrasing will be difficult. Next, remove yourself from the source material. Bookmark and close the book or minimize the article on your computer before jotting down your paraphrased passage and noting key terms. Then reopen the source and examine the original passage once more; determine if your paraphrased version accurately reflects the key information your readers will need, and add “quotation marks to identify any unique term or phraseology you have borrowed exactly from the source” (para. 4). Finally, Purdue instructs students to wrap up by noting the source information, including the page number(s), for future reference.</p>

Adapted from Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.). Paraphrase: Write it in your own words. Retrieved June 20, 2017, from <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/1/>

Analyzing Sources with Your Input

When reviewing literature, choose signal phrases that introduce your own analysis and connect ideas.

The examples below, modified from NPS student papers, show how to use signal phrases to insert your own analysis into source discussion. For more, see the GWC workshop [slides](#) for *Joining the Academic Conversation*, or attend the [workshop](#).

Signal Phrases for Analyzing Source Information and Claims		
By focusing on _____, the author overlooks the deeper problem of _____.	The study’s claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____.	This paper disagrees with [Author Name]’s view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.
Although [Author Name] is correct up to a point, this paper claims that _____ is no longer a major force today.	This paper supports [Author 1]’s position that _____, but finds [Author 2]’s argument in favor of _____ equally persuasive.	Although this thesis disagrees with much that the [Organization Name] report proposes, it fully endorses its conclusion that _____.
This interpretation challenges the work of those critics who have long assumed that _____.	These conclusions will have significant applications in _____ as well as _____.	This thesis relies on [Author Name]’s definition of _____, as “_____.”



Citing Your Sources' Sources

Signal phrases are also used to clarify incorporation of **secondary**, **indirect**, and **tertiary sources**. The distinctions between these source types can sometimes be muddy, and can differ according to context. But, generally:

- First, a **primary source** is a first-hand account, or information provided as raw material. Examples include transcripts of speeches, videotaped presentations, autobiographies, interviews, and data that has not been analyzed.
- **Secondary sources**, as described by [Virginia Tech](#), are those that “analyze, review, or summarize information in primary resources or other secondary resources.” For example:
 - A transcript of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech is a primary source; a historian’s discussion or analysis of King’s speech is a secondary source.
 - The author of a journal article may analyze raw data (a primary source) collected by a research team, as well as another researcher’s analysis of the same data (a secondary source). When the author draws conclusions about the data and discusses evidence, his article becomes a secondary source.
- An **indirect source** is a source within a source. For example, the author of a book you are consulting—let’s say her name is Perez—cites a journal article *she* consulted that backs up her book’s claims. If you incorporate Perez’s discussion of that article into your paper *rather than reading and citing the original article yourself*, you are using an indirect source. Try to avoid using indirect sources; whenever possible, review and cite the original source instead.
- A **tertiary source** distills or synthesizes information from various primary and secondary sources into a larger compilation. Encyclopedias, handbooks, and biographies are a few examples offered by [Virginia Tech](#).

When to Use a Secondary or Indirect Source*

- Use a secondary source that draws an apt or unique conclusion about primary source data.
- Use a secondary source that incorporates data or draws pertinent conclusions from *several* other sources.
- Use a secondary source’s nuanced or unique description of other related source material.
- Explain another author’s inclusion of other (indirect) sources to provide validation or clarity.
- Use an indirect source when the original source is not available to you.

How to Incorporate Your Sources' Sources

The following passage incorporates a properly credited secondary source. The **secondary source** information is highlighted in yellow; the **primary source** information is highlighted in blue.

Primary and Secondary Source Material
<p>Walker (2008) describes data collected in 1999 by Miguel Roig that correlates students’ inadequate paraphrasing to poor reading comprehension. Citing Roig’s data, Walker explains that “students do in fact possess skills necessary for paraphrasing but ... may be impeded from applying those skills when dealing with rigorous text” (p. 387).</p>

NOTE: Include only the **secondary source** (the source *you* consulted) in your reference list. For Chicago Notes and Bibliography, include both sources in your footnote (see [CMS 14.273](#)).

***TIP:** *Whenever possible, consult primary sources and your sources’ sources yourself. Upon further investigation, you may find you disagree with the secondary source author’s analysis or methods.*

