

SIGNAL PHRASES

Academic writing consists of writers borrowing and integrating the ideas and research of other sources to clarify and support their own ideas. Writers integrate these sources into academic papers via the techniques of summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation, utilizing APA citation (author-publication year) to identify the source. In addition to APA citation, however, writers must also employ signal phrases to make clear distinctions between their voice and ideas and the voices and ideas of others borrowed for support.

When signal phrases are carefully chosen and effectively employed, the audience will clearly know when a source is speaking and when the writer is speaking.

Signal phrases make the distinction between writer and source clear for the audience. Signal phrases utilize APA citation along with *past tense* verbs. Here are some examples of common signal phrases used in summary and paraphrase:

As Smith (2004) noted, ...	Jones (2001) concluded...
According to Stevens (2002), ...	McHugh (2003) contrasted this idea...
Moreover, Smith (2004) added...	Elliot and Pruett (2008) argued...

Writers should try to vary the choice of signal phrase verbs to maintain variety and reader interest, but writers should also choose the verb that appropriately characterizes the context of the idea being borrowed. For example, if a source was clearly disputing an idea or claim, then *disputed* would be the appropriate verb choice. Here is a list of common signal phrase verbs writers may use:

Acknowledged	Believed	Declared	Granted	Observed	Reported
Added	Claimed	Denied	Illustrated	Offered	Responded
Admitted	Commented	Disclosed	Implied	Pointed out	Suggested
Addressed	Compared	Disputed	Insisted	Reasoned	Testified
Argued	Confirmed	Emphasized	Negated	Refuted	Thought
Asserted	Contended	Endorsed	Noted	Rejected	Wrote

It is also important for writers to employ signal phrases to introduce direct quotes in order to identify and attribute the source being quoted and to establish the purpose, context, relevance, and credibility of the direct quote.

No signal phrase:

However, the merits of cancer screening are currently debated by new data. “Yearly prostate exams are not nearly as effective at reducing the risk of dying of prostate cancer as most men think” (Woki 2).

Revised with signal phrase:

However, the merits of cancer screening are currently debated by new data. According to Dr. Dan Boyd (2009), the director of cancer research at the Woki Clinic, who just produced one of the new studies on cancer screening, “yearly prostate exams are not nearly as effective at reducing the risk of dying of prostate cancer as most men think” (Woki 2).

Signal phrases are also important for writers to identify and distinguish their voices and ideas. In APA style, writers employ the use of third person to add objectivity to the their claims.

For example,

I conclude that the merits of cancer screening must be reappraised...

becomes

Doctors may conclude that the merits of cancer screening must be reappraised...

Writers should *NOT* choose to identify their own voices by using signal phrases such as “this writer” or “this author” to introduce and distinguish their own ideas and claims from sources borrowed for support. For more information, see the handout “Writing in Third Person: What Not Using the First Person REALLY Means.”