

SIGNAL PHRASES OR NARRATIVE CITATIONS are used across citation styles to introduce quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.¹ They are frequently used together with parenthetical citations. They *signal* to a reader that the writer is using an outside source. They help writers avoid plagiarism, integrate quotes, and establish the authority of their sources. Here are two examples:

- Peter Ratcliffe, Detective Superintendent of the London City Police, points out “. . .”
- The National Institute of Mental Health (NIHM) disputed . . .

HOW TO USE SIGNAL PHRASES:

A signal phrase can be used at the beginning or end of a sentence. In some cases, signal phrases are omitted in favor of parenthetical () citations. There is no single way to use them. Nonetheless, while learning citation, it can be helpful to follow the steps outlined below:

1. **Name the source** (author(s), agency, organization, title of work etc.).
2. **If your source is not well-known, consider indicating what makes that source an authority.**
 - This is most commonly seen during the first use of a source in MLA style.
3. **Choose a signal phrase verb that reflects the source’s tone, attitude, or position.**
4. **Add your quote, paraphrase, or summary.**
5. **Include any information necessary for a full in-text reference in the required citation style.**

SIGNAL PHRASES ACROSS CITATION STYLES | EXAMPLES

MLA
Marianne Egeland, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Oslo, **argues** that Plath’s personal story
1 2 3
has come to dominate almost all assessments of her work (27).
4 5

APA
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2013) **reported** that “males take their own lives at nearly four
1 5 3 4
times the rate of females.”

CHICAGO (NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY)
 As Eileen Scully, historian, teacher, and author, **points out**, Dolin’s reference to the “sexual favors freely offered by
1 2 3 4
native women” is problematic.

CITATION STYLE DIFFERENCES

The Modern Language Association (**MLA**) and the **Chicago** Manual or Style (CMOS) require **present tense** verbs (e.g. acknowledges, reports) to introduce most quotations.

The American Psychological Association (**APA**) requires the use of **past** (acknowledged, reported) or **present perfect tense** (has acknowledged, has reported) verbs to introduce most quotations and research results.

¹ Some instructors request unvoiced summaries. These do not make use of signal phrases.

SIGNAL PHRASE VERBS:

acknowledges	balances	demonstrates	endeavors to
adds	confirms	denies	establishes
admits	connects	describes	estimates
advances	considers	develops	explains
affirms	contends	discounts	expresses
agrees	contradicts	discovers	extrapolates
alludes	contrasts	discusses	finds
analyzes	creates	discloses	focuses on
argues	declares	disputes	introduces
asserts	defines	documents	maintains
attests	delineates	emphasizes	means
grants	offers	refutes	specifies
highlights	organizes	reiterates	speculates
hypothesizes	points out	rejects	states
illuminates	prepares	relates	submits
illustrates	presents	remarks	suggests
implies	promises	replies	supports
indicates	proposes	reports	supposes
informs	proves	recognizes	theorizes
insists	purports	responds	thinks
narrates	questions	reveals	wishes
negates	recommends	says	writes
notes	recounts	sees	verifies
notices	refers	shows	
observes	reflects	signals	

THIS GUIDE CONSULTED THE *MLA HANDBOOK*, (2016), THE *PUBLICATION MANUAL OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION* (2019), THE *LITTLE SEAGULL HANDBOOK* BY RICHARD BULLOCK, MICHAL BRODY AND FRANCINE WEINBERG (2014), AS WELL AS THE ONLINE WRITING LAB (OWL) AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY.