

IMPORTANCE OF SIGNAL PHRASES

Why are signal phrases and proper introduction of quotations so important? They allow you to avoid one of the most common errors in student research papers: the quote bomb. Here is an example. "I think that we're all mentally ill; those of us outside the asylums only hide it a little better--and maybe not all that much better, after all."

Where did the quotation come from? In what context was it used? Without a signal phrase and introduction, this intriguing quotation becomes perplexing and uninformative. Now let's use a signal phrase. **Stephen King begins his speculative essay on America's fascination with horror movies with the following lines:** "I think that we're all mentally ill; those of us outside the asylums only hide it a little better--and maybe not all that much better, after all."

In order to prepare the reader for the purpose of the quotation, introduce it with an appropriate phrase. Additionally, this signal phrase provides an effective lead-in into the author's material, and it contributes his/her authority and credibility in the subject area to your paper. Ordinarily, these verbs should be used in the literary present tense. Here is a short list of examples:

insists	declares	suggests	argues	theorizes
adds	proposes	concludes	explains	speculates
finds	states	agrees	continues	questions
asserts	compares	disagrees	maintains	establishes
notes	observes	hypothesizes	postulates	

SIGNAL PHRASE INCLUDING "THAT"

"That" is a magic word in signal phrase punctuation: it generally negates the need for a comma. Note the difference below:

Smith asserts, "The benefits to online instruction are numerous."

Smith asserts that "[t]he benefits to online instruction are numerous."

INDICATING CHANGES IN QUOTATIONS

When you use a quotation in your paper, you must copy it exactly from the source. There are times, however, when it is appropriate to alter a source, and you must indicate that you have made changes. These instances are mentioned briefly below.

1. Words omitted--use an ellipsis (...). *Example:* Mack comments, "The most commonly debated issue . . . leads us to the center of our questions about perceptions and levels of consciousness."
2. Change in verb tense or word endings to avoid grammatical awkwardness within your sentence--enclose the letters or words you've changed in square brackets [].
3. Change in capitalization so the quotation fits grammatically within your sentence--enclose the letter you've changed in square brackets [].

There are a couple of instances in which you do not need to indicate that you've changed the original source's punctuation. You may change the period at the end of a quotation to a comma so that it can be integrated into your sentence. If the material you plan to quote already has quotation marks in it, you need to change those double quotation marks to single quotation marks. You can also add information to a quotation by enclosing your own words in square brackets [] to clarify an unclear pronoun reference or to add needed explanatory material.