



# OWLS Writing Guides: Quotations & Signal phrases

## USING SIGNAL PHRASES TO INTEGRATE QUOTATIONS INTO YOUR WRITING

Effective use of quotations requires that you include quotations in your paper in a way that allows the reader to understand the relevance of the quoted material to your own argument. You should never drop a quotation into your paper unannounced and apparently unrelated to the ideas around it. The quotation must *always* be embedded into one of your own sentences.

A common way to do this is to use a 'signal phrase' that incorporates the quotation smoothly into your writing and, just as importantly, provides context for the material. Very often a signal phrase will also name the author of the quoted material, thus serving at once to include the quotation smoothly and to attribute the idea to its source, as in the following example:

Although the oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico is drifting west of the Mississippi River, it could still threaten points east. According to Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen, "Depending on which way the wind blows, it could threaten Mississippi, Alabama and Florida as well."

To avoid monotony, vary the signal phrases you use to integrate quotations, as in these examples:

**In the words of** author and essayist Samuel Johnson, "The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good."

As Divakaruni **has noted**, "Looking down from the heights of Maslow's pyramid, it seems inconceivable to us that someone could actually prefer bread to freedom."

Arthur Hardy, a renowned expert on New Orleans Carnival traditions, **points out** that "Mardi Gras came to North America from Paris, where it had been celebrated since the Middle Ages."

Racial profiling "makes a mockery of the rights to which people in this country are entitled," **claims** columnist Colbert I. King.

Sir Winston Churchill **offers** this wise advice: "If you are going through hell, keep going."

Sheffield answers her critics by **conceding**, "The proposal did not account sufficiently for the economic downturn."

**Signal phrases and attributors may come anywhere within your sentence—at the beginning, to introduce a quotation; in the middle of a quotation; or at the end, after the quotation has been given. For example:**

"We have a crime problem in this country," **writes Barry Goldwater**, "not a gun problem."

"We have a crime problem in this country, not a gun problem," **asserts the late Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater**.

**You don't always have to use a writer's name in your signal phrase, for example:**

**One U.S. Senator has claimed,** “We have a crime problem in this country, not a gun problem.”

**Many opponents of gun-control regulations would agree** that “[w]e have a crime problem in this country, not a gun problem.”

**Vary the signal verbs you use to introduce quotations, and choose them with care.**

Use the verb that most closely captures how your source is presenting the idea. Is the author you are quoting merely saying something? Or would it be more accurate to write that the source is arguing a point, making an observation, reporting facts, drawing a conclusion, refuting an argument, or stating a belief? Choose the verb that makes the author’s stance clear. There are many available to use, including these:

acknowledges	comments	describes	maintains	reports
adds	compares	disputes	notes	responds
admits	concedes	emphasizes	observes	shows
agrees	confirms	endorses	points out	states
argues	contends	illustrates	reasons	suggests
asserts	declares	implies	refutes	summarizes
claims	denies	insists	rejects	writes

**A reminder about grammar:** A quotation must be made to fit the syntax and grammar of your sentence, so take care as you experiment with signal phrases to introduce quotations. Make sure the result is a grammatically correct sentence. Do not use signal phrase such as “he writes” to introduce a quotation that is not a complete sentence, such as in the following example:

Incorrect: Brown writes, “My childhood, which was happy and carefree, but passed by too fast.”

Correct: Brown writes, “My childhood . . . was happy and carefree, but passed by too fast.”

Also correct: Brown describes her childhood as “happy and carefree,” but she laments that it “passed by too fast.”

As in the examples above, you may need to use ellipses marks and brackets to modify a quotation for the sake of sentence grammar, but never distort the original meaning of the quotation as you do so.

**A reminder about punctuation:** Quotations may be introduced by two--and only two--marks of punctuation, the comma and the colon. Never introduce a quotation with a semicolon.

**A reminder about source citation:** None of the examples above use citations to attribute the quotation to its source. Be aware that whenever you use a quotation in your paper, you should cite it using the citation style specified by your professor, such as MLA style for papers in the humanities, APA style for papers in psychology, Chicago or Turabian style for papers in history.