Different disciplines have varying guidelines, but it is always a good idea to provide readers with introductory words that provide context for your use of a quotation.

For an overview of related key topics on quoting sources, visit the videos and quizzes in this tutorial.

Explore It

Quotations of sources need to be thoughtfully and appropriately integrated into your work. Whenever you incorporate a quotation into your draft, you must introduce it with a signal phrase, showing readers where it comes from and offering background information, if the source or author will be unknown to readers.

Signal phrases are introductory words and phrases you use to integrate a quotation, usually including the author's name along with some other identifying information about your source.

Have a look at the following excerpts from Vincent Rocchio's book *Reel Racism: Confronting Hollywood's Construction of Afro-American Culture*:

As Cornel West has demonstrated, succinct answers about race and racism are becoming an increasing part of the problem. West argues, “most of us remain trapped in the narrow framework of the dominant liberal and conservative views of race in America, which with its worn-out vocabulary leaves us intellectually debilitated, morally disempowered, and personally depressed.”

In his insightful work on race and ideology, for example, Arthur K. Spears defines racism as “behaviors which indirectly or directly support the inequality of racial hierarchy.”

The author uses effective signal phrases, allowing the reader to identify the source of the quoted material, along with some additional context. The signal phrases characterize the authors of the cited sources as well. Cornel West “argues” a point; Arthur K. Spears is described as authoring an “insightful work.” These passages also end with superscript numbers (following Chicago style) that lead readers to notes that include bibliographical information on the source of each quotation.


Learn It

Use signal phrases to weave sources smoothly into your draft. Take care to use signal phrases that help readers understand how the quoted material relates to your own writing and ideas. Avoid dropping quoted material into your draft without introduction. Signal phrases also show where your words end and where the source’s words begin.

Contextualize your quotes A common complaint from teachers is that students tend to drop quotations into their papers without explaining how the quotation relates to the student’s argument. When you quote or paraphrase from a source, it is necessary to provide some context.

The signal verbs you choose establish your credibility with readers and give them a sense of how you will rely on a source and expect them to read your use of that source. Therefore, use signal verbs that convey the right meaning. You may choose signal verbs that suggest a quoted source is arguing a point, challenging another authority, or offering an illustration. These verbs can be neutral (for example, Packer writes, Levy thinks) or portray a source’s author as taking a position you challenge (Roiphe disputes, Gore believes).

As Lola Young argues . . . In their work, Stam and Spence put forward . . .
Thus, as Angela Ards reports . . . Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has argued . . .
In their article, “Colonialism, Racism, and Representation,” Stam and Spence demonstrate that . . . Christopher Norris summed up the implications of this theory . . .

Some Common Signal Verbs

acknowledges describes reports
agrees disagrees responds
argues discusses reveals
asks emphasizes shows
believes explains suggests
claims illustrates thinks
compares notes writes
concludes observes warns
declares remarks

Note in the examples above that the verbs appear in both present and past tense, depending on the discipline and documentation style. MLA style recommends use of the present tense (Prager argues), while APA style requires use of past tense for signal verbs (Gladwell concluded). The verbs you choose in a Chicago-style paper can be either present or past tense, depending on context; signal verbs should be in the same tense as those in the rest of your discussion. Depending on your discipline and the style you are using, your signal phrases may need to use present or past tense verbs.
Signal phrases also mark boundaries for your readers, so that as they read it’s clear when they go from your words and ideas to those of your sources. Choose and position signal phrases carefully in order to do the following:

• alert readers that you are introducing a quotation
• reinforce that you continue to refer to the source rather than your own ideas with such language as they add or Brown continues
• explain the significance of your sources
• identify the authors of your sources as experts in their field

Use It

Consider the following list of sentences taken from a student essay about Henry David Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience. In each one, the signal phrase is missing a verb. Review the list of signal verbs below and choose one to introduce each of the following quotations from Thoreau’s essay. Is Thoreau arguing any of these statements? reporting? stating a belief? concluding? Make sure the verb you choose reflects the stance Thoreau takes in each particular statement.

**Suggested Verbs**

| acknowledges | confirms | observes |
| adds | disputes | notes |
| agrees | emphasizes | points out |
| asserts | grants | reasons |
| claims | illustrates | |
| comments | implies | |

Note that you might be able to “hear” Thoreau’s tone in the sentences below, but if you would prefer to read the quotations in context, the full text of Civil Disobedience is available in Questia and on other Web sites, such as Project Gutenberg.

1. As Henry David Thoreau _____________________, “I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.”
2. “I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave’s government also,” the abolitionist Thoreau _____________________.
3. Morally opposed to both the Mexican-American war and slavery, Thoreau _____________________ that “[u]nder a government which imprisons unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.”
4. “Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence,” Thoreau _____________________ to the American people. “A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight.”
5. “I have paid no poll tax for six years,” Thoreau _____________________.