Different disciplines have varying guidelines, but you should always alert readers to the source of a summary and use introductory words that provide context.

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

Explore It

Like quotations and paraphrases, summaries of sources need to be thoughtfully and appropriately integrated into your work. Signal phrases are introductory words and phrases you use to integrate a summary, giving the author’s name along with some other identifying information about your source.

Following is a passage taken from a book on the history of the women of the Republican party, followed by a student’s summary of the passage. Highlighted in yellow are the signal phrases used to introduce summarized information.

**Original Source**
The National Federation of Republican Women offered women primarily a supportive, auxiliary role in political life. And indeed, the Federation had proved itself critical to party successes. But by defining women’s political work during the Eisenhower years in the popular language of postwar domesticity, the Federation offered little challenge to male political authority. Federation members during the 1950s earned a reputation for holding views more conservative than those of the party as a whole; yet they were being trained by the Federation leadership to subordinate those views to the good of the party.

—Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right*, pp. 131–32

**Summary**
Rymph reveals how essential the National Federation of Republican Women was, even in a supporting role, to the success of the Republican party in the 1950s. Further, she suggests that although the members of the Federation had more conservative ideas than the party promoted, their voices were downplayed in order to maintain the party’s strength (131–32).

The summary uses effective signal phrases, allowing the student to weave the summary into a draft. This summary explains something about the writer of the source, using the signal verb reveals to characterize the original passage as presenting new information. The summary also includes page numbers at the end of the second sentence, to clarify the location of the information within the book and to indicate to readers the end of the summarized information.

**Learn It**

Use signal phrases to weave sources into your draft smoothly. Take care to set off the material you summarize clearly with signal phrases that help readers know where your cited material appears.

The signal verbs you choose establish your credibility with readers and give them a sense of how you will rely on a source. Therefore, use signal verbs that convey the right meaning and show readers how you expect them to read your summary of that source. You may choose signal verbs that suggest a summarized 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).

Choose and position signal phrases carefully in order to do the following:

- alert readers that you are introducing ideas from a source
- distinguish between your ideas and ideas summarized from sources
- reinforce that you continue to refer to the source with such language as they add or Brown continues
- explain the significance of your sources
- identify your sources as experts in their field

**Some Common Signal Verbs**

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When you shift from the ideas that belong to a source to your own ideas, it can be helpful to use language of comparison and contrast. Some examples follow:

On the other hand, Brad Prager argues . . .
In contrast, Tyler Grant explains . . .
Instead, Malcolm Gladwell suggested . . .
While some experts disagree, Green admitted . . .

Note that depending on your discipline and the style you are using, verb tenses differ. Your signal phrases should use present-tense verbs (*Prager argues*) for papers following MLA style. In other disciplines using APA style, signal verbs use the past tense (*Gladwell suggested*). Chicago allows for either present or past tense, but notes that verb tenses in the paper need to be consistent.
Use It

Use meaningful verbs to suggest how you are using your source. The phrase according to Tyler or Jackson says tells your reader very little about the significance of the information or how the writer is using the source. Read the following short summary and then look over the following list of signal verbs. Choose two or three verbs and try rewriting the summary using each verb (you may need to do some rephrasing as well). How does each verb change the meaning of the summary in the example?

Thomas Murray writes that the pressure to use performance-enhancing drugs forces athletes either to participate or to leave themselves at a competitive disadvantage.

**Suggested Verbs**
- admits
- asks
- argues
- agrees
- answers
- compares
- explains
- illustrates
- interprets
- responds
- reveals
- warns