

A Guide to Signal Phrases

This guide will discuss signal phrases—what they are and how best to use them.

Simply put, a **signal phrase is a phrase or sentence that introduces a quotation.**

Signal phrases set the stage for a quotation, prepare your audience for what they are about to read, and generally enhance the *descriptive quality* of your quotation.

Example 1: *Author John Doe insists*, “Big bird is a freak.”

In this case, “*Author John Doe insists*,” is the signal phrase that transitions us into his statement, “Big bird is a freak.”

Example 2: *Witnesses denied the defendant had a knife in the courtroom but had this to say about his breath:* “It smelled like rotten eggs. We wish we’d never been called in.”

Signal phrases demonstrate your understanding of the quotation itself. They also allow for smooth transitions.

Try reading the above example *without* the signal phrase that precedes it. Sounds bad—right? That’s because a **signal phrase helps you own a quotation.**

Other popular signal phrases include the following: *argue, assert, claim, comment, confirm, contend, declare, deny, emphasize, illustrate, imply, insist, note, observe, point out, report, respond, say, suggest, think, and write.*

Note: You should not simply introduce a quotation. **You should also re-iterate its meaning in a follow-up sentence.**

Example 3: *Author John Doe insists*, “Big bird is a freak.” *He further discusses his past refusal to own a TV for fear of Sesame Street.*

In this way, a signal phrases help you smoothly transition into, *and out of*, a quotation.

Now Try This!

Read through academic articles, and note the signal phrases authors have used. Look at what precedes and follows a quotation. You will get some creative ideas for your own signal phrases and transitions.