

Using Signal Phrases in MLA Papers

When using direct quotations in a research report or documented essay, **use signal phrases to identify the source and type of information** (facts, opinions, observations, etc.) **and to help readers distinguish the author’s information from your own.** This prevents you from *dropping* quotations, which can confuse readers and make them think a specific idea or opinion is yours. Effective signal phrases include the author’s name and an action verb that characterizes the information. Try varying the placement and language of the signal phrase to avoid repetition. Also, be consistent with verb tenses; MLA uses the present tense (e.g. “notes”) or present perfect tense (e.g. “has noted”).

Model Signal Phrases

- a) Serrano and Coronado state, “...” (87).
- b) As Joe Molina notes, “...”
- c) Patti Buenrostro, Associate Professor of Spanish Literature, contends “...” (4).
- d) “...,” states Carlos Fuentes, “but ...” (141).
- e) “...,” according to TAMIU President Dr. Ray Keck (12).
- f) Television news broadcaster Roy Herrera offers another perspective: “...” (10).



Remember to include a parenthetical citation, after the direct quotation. (See the handout “Most Common MLA Entries for a Works Cited Page & In-text Citations.”)

Verbs to Use in Signal Phrases

acknowledges	argues	compares	debunks	disputes	explores	insists	observes
accepts	asserts	concedes	declares	emphasizes	follows	justifies	points out
adds	believes	confirms	defends	elucidates	grants	juxtaposes	proposes
admits	claims	contends	demonstrates	endorses	illustrates	notes	questions
agrees	comments	critiques	denies	evaluates	implies	offers	recognizes
refutes	rejects	reports	responds	states	suggests	thinks	writes

Choose appropriate verbs so the reader knows if the source is refuting a claim, illustrating a point, or comparing points of view.