Signal Phrases, Tags, and Verbs

Signal phrases or tags are phrases or clauses used to introduce a source you are quoting, paraphrasing, or explaining in your paper.

➔ All Direct Quotes require a tag (phrase) to introduce the quoted passage, as well as needing an MLA-formatted in-text citation, which includes the source’s author’s name(s) and/or page number depending on the information the source.

Dialogue-Style Tag
A “who” and a strong (action) verb followed by a comma, with the quoted passage capitalized

a. One scientist notes, “The sky is blue” (Burbeck 210).

b. The scientist Rebecca Burbeck explains, “The sky is blue” (210).

Full-Sentence Tag
Write your own full and complete sentence to set up the main idea in the quoted passage; notice the full-sentence tag is followed by a colon and capitalizes the quoted passage.

a. When writing, it is important to write in steps: “By writing in steps, errors can be found and corrected more easily” (Higgins 9).

b. Brian Higgins, a psychologist focused on improving academic skills, reveals the importance of writing in steps: “By writing in steps, errors can be found and corrected more easily” (9).

Blended Sentence
Borrowing just a “word” or “short phrase” and building your own sentence around it; punctuate and capitalize based on the sentence structure.

a. Education can be “the great equalizer” among people (Mann 18).

b. American educator Horace Mann referred to education as “the great equalizer” (18).
Tags/Signal Phrases While Paraphrasing

Using tags and signal phrases while paraphrasing helps distinguish that you are using an outside source.

- **Without Tag:** Writing in steps is helpful during the editing process (Higgins 9).
- **With Tag:** One source notes that writing in steps is helpful during the editing process (Higgins 9).

**Building Context to Create Different Tag**

For example:

- Jim states, “I did not believe that my dead father and mother were watching me from up” (Cather 118).

Note that while this entry is correct, the statement can be improved by the following changes:

- When Jim first arrives in Nebraska, he states, “I did not believe that my dead father and mother were watching me from up” (Cather 118).

Note that again, this statement is correct. However, it can be improved as such:

- When Jim first arrives in Nebraska, he discusses his feelings about his dead parents: “I did not believe that my dead father and mother were watching me from up” (Cather 118).

**Signal Verbs**

Signal verbs help create powerful signal phrases and tags. Some verbs commonly used in signal phrases are:

- acknowledges
- compares
- discusses
- observes
- reports
- adds
- confirms
- emphasizes
- points out
- responds
- addresses
- contends
- highlights
- provides
- reveals
- argues
- declares
- illustrates
- reasons
- states
- asserts
- deliberates
- insists
- refutes
- suggests
- claims
- disputes
- notes
- rejects
- writes