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 APA-formatted in-text citation, which generally includes the source’s author’s name(s), the year the work was published, and/or page number where the quote can be found.

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


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, 2011, p. 9).

b. In a study focused on improving academic performance, Higgins (2011) highlighted the importance of writing in steps: “By writing in steps, errors can be found and corrected more easily” (p. 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, 1868, p. 18).

b. American educator Horace Mann (1868) referred to education as “the great equalizer” (p. 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, 2011, p. 9).
- **With Tag:** One source notes that writing in steps is helpful during the editing process (Higgins, 2011, p. 9).

**Building Context to Create Different Tag**

For example:


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

- A study using elementary school students concluded “rubric use relieved students of uncertainty about expectations” (Bradford et al., 2016, p. 471).

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

- During a study comparing rubric use for elementary school students and writing instruction alone, researchers concluded “rubric use relieved students of uncertainty about expectations” (Bradford et al., 2016, p. 471).

**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
- write