

Signal Phrases and Effective Verbs for Referring to Source Material

When you are writing a paper that cites other sources, you need to anchor your quotations and paraphrases into your paper using your own words. Anchoring your source materials establishes your authority as the foremost voice in your paper (the “emcee” of sorts, who introduces other sources). Anchoring also helps your readers to easily know which source you are referring to. A quotation should never be left “dangling” in your paper, unconnected to your own words.

Consider these three examples:

- ✓ Conwell writes, "Love of money is the root of all evil."
- ✓ Eve Sedgwick states, "Obsession is the most durable form of intellectual capital."
- ✓ Karl Marx says that religion functions to dull people's resentment towards oppression.

“Conwell writes” and “Eve Sedgwick states” are sufficient **signal phrases** for introducing and framing the words and ideas of the sources. "Says" and "states" are bland words, however, especially when used over and over in a paper. The following verbs offer some variety in introducing source materials. Be warned, though: some of these words have specific connotations that might not exactly fit the tone you are trying to achieve, and some of these should only be used when paraphrasing an author’s viewpoint but not when introducing a direct quotation. Read the explanations carefully.

VERB	USAGE	EXAMPLE
<i>Acknowledge</i>	Introduces something the author mentions that some other writer might have easily overlooked, ignored, or hidden; see also admit, allow, concede, confess, grant	Kishimoto acknowledges that his awareness of his own ethnic body arose only when he went abroad.
<i>Admit</i>	Suggests that the author only reluctantly offers the information you're discussing; see also acknowledge, allow, concede, confess, grant	In his autobiography, he freely admits that his creationist viewpoint comes from a literalistic interpretation of the Bible and not from scientific evidence.
<i>Advocate</i>	Indicates that the author is recommending or supporting something; see also propose	Singer advocates the abolition of the use of animals in vivisection and for food.
<i>Affirm</i>	Indicates something the author strongly believes to be factual; see also assume, believe, insist, maintain, presume, suppose, view	Article II affirms , “Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals.”
<i>Agree</i>	Indicates that the author is echoing a viewpoint already established in your paper	Yi-Fu Tuan agrees that desire is both socially inflected and ecologically significant.
<i>Allow</i>	Introduces an idea that the author has accepted to be true even though it seems to go against the author’s overall argument; see also acknowledge, admit, concede, confess, grant	Katz allows that her proposal would “strain the budget,” but she insists that “the costs of not implementing the plan would be far greater.”

VERB	USAGE	EXAMPLE
<i>Argue</i>	Indicates that the author is taking a stand on an issue; see also claim, contend, hypothesize, offer, posit	Alexander Chumakov argues , “[U]nder the influence of globalization, the international community becomes more and more a single integrated system in almost all spheres of social life.”
<i>Assume</i>	Looks at an author's underlying reasons for making a particular claim; if applicable, you might follow a quote introduced by "assume" with an explanation of why this assumption is accurate or inaccurate; see also affirm, believe, insist, maintain, presume, suppose, view	It should be noted that, as in the preceding poem, Rizal assumes that education, to be "complete and true," should be Christian.
<i>Assure</i>	Suggests that the author has presented a persuasive claim that could be considered questionable	Alexander Hamilton assures Talleyrand that either Philadelphia or New York will be ultimately the financial center of the world.
<i>Believe</i>	Introduces a position that the author accepts as truth even though others may disagree; see also affirm, assume, insist, maintain, presume, suppose, view	Umansky believes that God is both immanent and transcendent; she works to create new images of divinity that will encourage herself and others to work with God rather than under God's authority.
<i>Blame</i>	Indicates that the author is assigning responsibility for a negative outcome; see also censure, condemn, criticize, object	Historian Janam Mukherjee blames the premature application in 1942 of a misguided British naval defense strategy for the Bengali famine of 1943—the “year of the corpse.”
<i>Censure</i>	Introduces source material that includes a reprimand of some sort; see also blame, condemn, criticize, object	As a man of letters, Emerson censures the "practical men" who "sneer" at the intellectual clergy, but then he himself sneers; he disdains the "mincing speech" of ministers.
<i>Characterize</i>	Suggests that the author has described something in a particular way so the reader will come to a particular conclusion; see also depict	Rodriguez characterizes Mexico as a warmhearted but demanding mother.
<i>Claim</i>	Like "argue," indicates that the author is taking a stand on an issue; see also argue, contend, hypothesize, offer, posit	Freud claims that the women in his audience who are intelligent enough to understand him are more masculine than feminine.
<i>Clarify</i>	Suggests that the author has provided some extra elaboration in order to make clear something that could be easily misunderstood	Moreover, as Morrison clarifies , these black men are desired, not for who they are, but because they are merely “exotica.”

VERB	USAGE	EXAMPLE
<i>Classify</i>	Introduces a passage that breaks a topic down into categories	We must remember that Foucault classifies biopolitics, thanatopolitics and anatomopolitics as “technologies of power,” and this implies that, like any technologies, they can be turned to a variety of purposes.
<i>Commend</i>	Indicates that the author is praising someone or is assigning responsibility for a positive outcome	Obama commends the Court's decision to strike down “discrimination enshrined in law.”
<i>Concede</i>	Introduces an idea that the author has accepted to be true even though it seems to go against the author’s overall argument; see also acknowledge, admit, allow, confess, grant	Although Garber concedes “some of our store people didn't like it,” the sale was a huge success, ringing up sales of more than \$100,000 an hour for seven hours.
<i>Conclude</i>	Suggests that the author reaches a decision after studying the topic carefully; see also show, prove	Mesquita concludes , “Emotional experience differs fundamentally between individualist and collectivist cultures.”
<i>Condemn</i>	Introduces a passage that attacks or denounces someone; see also blame, censure, criticize, object	Douglass condemns the profits made from the slave trade, and, once again, he compares the treatment of slaves to that of animals.
<i>Confess</i>	Suggests that the author only reluctantly includes the information you’re discussing; see also acknowledge, admit, allow, concede, grant	Fearing that his nature writing is merely crumbs in comparison to the bounty with which God has provided nature lovers, John Muir confesses , “I can write only hints to incite good wanderers to come to the feast.”
<i>Consider</i>	Indicates the author's main line of inquiry and suggests that the author entertained other perspectives or counterarguments	Chen considers what might result if China were to move away from its current reliance on literary histories.
<i>Contend</i>	Indicates that the author is presenting an arguable position; see also argue, claim, hypothesize, offer, posit	Bello contends that structural adjustment has utterly failed in every single instance.
<i>Criticize</i>	Indicates that the author is pointing out flaws or weaknesses in another person's arguments or actions; see also blame, censure, criticize, object	In her work on transgender history, Susan Stryker criticizes the erasure of events such as the Compton's Cafeteria riots, a predecessor to the Stonewall Riot, as rendering transgender history invisible.
<i>Define</i>	Indicates that the author is assigning a specific meaning to a given term or idea	Vinh-Kim Nguyen defines a “therapeutic economy” as “the totality of therapeutic options in a given location, as well as the rationale underlying the patterns of resort by which these therapies are accessed.”

VERB	USAGE	EXAMPLE
<i>Deny</i>	Indicates that the author is refuting another author's arguments, data, etc.	Cardona denies that the Tuta Affair was the major cause, instead charging that Padre Nunez, the labor minister, and Marten were leftists and too brash.
<i>Depict</i>	Like " characterize ," suggests that the author is describing something in a particular way so that the reader will come to a particular conclusion	The present world that Simon Ortiz depicts is a wasteland characterized by personal, environmental, and cultural loss.
<i>Describe</i>	Indicates that the author is offering a verbal picture of a setting or a situation or that the author is comparing metaphorically comparing someone or something	Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes Brathwaite as "the voice of African presence."
<i>Determine</i>	Like " conclude " and " decide " suggests that the author has reached a conclusion after careful study	Assessing this critical challenge three years later, Butler determines that queer theory has resisted Hiram Perez's call for boundary crossings.
<i>Doubt</i>	Suggests that the author is uncertain about a particular idea or argument	Park doubts the effectiveness of most IACUCs, saying there are no rules for their composition.
<i>Emphasize</i>	Suggests that the author has been very explicit and forceful about making a point; see also stress	By providing a thorough list of historical examples, Esposito emphasizes , "The fact is that philosophy has been a decisive source of inspiration in all the great crises that Europe has faced."
<i>Evaluate</i>	Suggests that the author has made a judgment of worth regarding a topic	Sarang evaluates these four methods by considering both the financial cost to the patient and the probability of long-term success.
<i>Explain</i>	Implies that the author carefully breaks down the topic	"When we seem to have won or lost in terms of certainties," Gayatri Spivak explains , "we must, as literature teachers in the classroom, remember such warnings: let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open, and that it may be altogether salutary that it is so."
<i>Expound</i>	Indicates that the author has given a very detailed, thorough, and systematic explanation of something and implies that this explanation has been lengthy	Appearing to exhaust Claudius and Gertrude, Polonius expounds a theory about Hamlet's apparent insanity.
<i>Feign</i>	Suggests that the author's true intentions are being concealed, either because the author is being sarcastic about discussing a topic in a certain way or because you believe the author is insincere for framing it that way	By repeatedly insisting that Brutus should be believed only because "Brutus is an honorable man," Antony feigns public support for his powerful foe while undermining him with evidence that points to his mistruths.

VERB	USAGE	EXAMPLE
<i>Grant</i>	Suggests that the author only reluctantly offers the information you're discussing; see also acknowledge, admit, allow, concede, confess	Hamblin grants that blueberries have many health benefits, but he stresses that they are nutritionally no more of a "superfood" than any other fruit or vegetable.
<i>Hedge</i>	Implies that the author's argument is weak because the terms are too broadly defined or because the position allows for too many exceptions	Theodore Roosevelt hedges when articulating this racial hierarchy, referring to the "English speaking races" rather than the more typical "Anglo-Saxons" in order to allow room for his own Dutch origins in the supposed uppermost echelon.
<i>Hypothesize</i>	Indicates that the author is making a prediction or has proposed an original argument; see also argue, claim, contend, offer, posit	Yasusuki Murakami hypothesizes that as Japan continues to prosper economically, people will inevitably start to seek emotional fulfillment through an increasingly self-centered lifestyle.
<i>Imply</i>	Indicates that an author is only suggesting a particular point, rather than coming right out and saying it	Achebe implies that strict adherence to scripture and dogma produces religious fanaticism.
<i>Indicate</i>	Like "say" or "state," this neutrally shows that the author is putting forth information	Desperation was the fate of those who stayed in Albania during the regime, as Ismail Kadare indicates in his novel <i>Life, Games and Death of Lul Mazreku</i> .
<i>Infer</i>	Indicates that the author has reached a conclusion by drawing out logical information about a topic	From his observations, Geertz infers that the Balinese cockfight is symbolically representative of the island's power structures.
<i>Insist</i>	Indicates that the author is clinging very strongly to a position that others would disagree with; see also affirm, assume, believe, maintain, presume, suppose, view	Atwood insists that she writes not satire but "realism verging on caricature," and declares, "I try to select characters who are outgrowths of their society. But my writing is closer to caricature than to satire--distortion rather than scathing attack--and as I say, it's largely realism."
<i>Justify</i>	Used when linking the author's claims to the evidence or rationale that the author uses	Mustafa justifies these extreme measures by saying they were meant to reciprocate what the shah had done to the Ottoman subjects in the previous years.
<i>Maintain</i>	Suggests that the author is taking a strong and consistent stand on an issue; see also affirm, assume, believe, insist, presume, suppose, view	Ioanna Kuçuradi maintains , "What the Universal Declaration intends to word is the conditions of this possibility."
<i>Object</i>	Introduces ideas that an author is opposed to; see also blame, censure, condemn, criticize	In his appraisal of Maraniss' <i>On Calderón</i> , Hesse objects to the author's labelling Calderón as reactionary.

VERB	USAGE	EXAMPLE
<i>Offer</i>	Suggests that the author has knowingly proposed information that is still under debate and could be rejected by readers; see also argue, claim, contend, hypothesize, posit	Benedict offers a rather pragmatic view of love: it will be increased when we do deeds of love for one another.
<i>Posit</i>	Indicates that the author believes something to be true even though that fact could be a reasonable basis for argument; see also argue, claim, contend, hypothesize, offer	Mead posits that this resistance to work is based on the welfare client's pessimism about life opportunities and a malaise stemming from historical oppression.
<i>Present</i>	Indicates that the author is putting forth information or a description	In <i>Nathan the Wise</i> , Lessing presents his own version of the medieval "parable of the three rings."
<i>Presume</i>	Looks at an author's underlying reasons for making a particular claim; if applicable, you might follow with an explanation of why this presumption is accurate or inaccurate; see also affirm, assume, believe, insist, maintain, suppose, view	This was done, Pauline Kael presumes in her scathing critique of the film <i>Petulia</i> , to show "that even the best the country has to offer is rotten."
<i>Propose</i>	Indicates an author is giving a suggestion for a solution; see also advocate	To address this, Kristeva proposes some political remedies, such as international agreements that would grant reciprocal rights to immigrants.
<i>Prove</i>	Indicates that an author has definitively supported an argument with persuasive evidence	Nattiez proves that music in and of itself does not tell a story unless a listener is actively looking for a narrative within the sounds.
<i>Quibble</i>	Indicates that the author has raised objections or criticisms that you believe to be minor or unnecessary	Johnson quibbles over Shakespeare's word choice, suggesting that the word "knife" will remind readers too much of kitchen cutlery for them to be sufficiently appalled by the violence in <i>Macbeth</i> .
<i>Reference</i>	Used when introducing the source material or evidence used by your author	Farah references the country's polyglot landscape in order to undermine notions that the Somali cultural identity is homogenous.
<i>Reveal</i>	Suggests that the author is unveiling new information	Marx reveals that the progressive increase in the rate of exploitation demands an uninterrupted expansion of production.
<i>Show</i>	Like " explain ," implies that the author carefully breaks down the topic; see also conclude, expound, prove, stress	Whereas García Márquez leaves his reader wondering whether historical cycles are always vicious, Allende shows that progressive enlightenment is possible—and, indeed, essential if women are to emancipate themselves.

VERB	USAGE	EXAMPLE
<i>Stress</i>	Like “ emphasize ,” indicates the main takeaway the author wants the reader to realize	Gladwell stresses that the right person (the messenger) with the right message in the right context can bring an idea to the “tipping point,” when “little ideas can make a big difference.”
<i>Suggest</i>	Used whenever an author’s claims are up for debate or when the author is proposing a solution; see also imply, propose	DNA, Edelman suggests , supplies a rough blueprint but does not prevent the brain from evolving in response to the demands of an infinitely varying world.
<i>Suppose</i>	Indicates that the author has assumed something to be true based on some evidence or probability but without definite proof; see also affirm, assume, believe, insist, maintain, presume, view	Descartes supposes the concept of extension is fully transparent and in need of no further analysis or explanation.
<i>View</i>	Introduces source material that seems more opinionated than evidence-based; see also affirm, assume, believe, insist, maintain, presume, suppose	Rather than view freedom as a condition that either is or is not, Iris Murdoch views freedom as an incremental achievement toward which individuals must perpetually strive.