Signal Phrases

Signal phrases are clear and short sentences used to integrate in a paper the words, ideas, and facts that have been borrowed from other authors. On top of indicating the presence of material borrowed from the literature, they ensure flow in a text that contains quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. When choosing a signal phrase, make sure that it relates the author’s message without wrongfully changing its meaning.

Even if signal phrases allow the reader to distinguish your ideas from the ideas of others, their use alone is not enough to avoid plagiarism—all borrowed material must be followed by an accurate reference done according to the right referencing style.

Comparison

To compare ideas presented in two or more sources, use signal phrases like:

- the author alludes to
- the author cites
- the author discusses
- the author draws on
- the author elaborates on
- the author expresses
- the author objects to
- the author refers to
- the author reflects on

Debate

To specify the position of the author that you are quoting, use signal phrases like:

- the author argues
- the author believes
- the author claims that
- the author considers
- this study denounces
- the author insists
- this study justifies
- the author maintains
- the author stresses

Explanation

To present the theories or concepts on which your paper is based, use signal phrases like:

- the author clarifies
- the author defines
- the author describes
- the author establishes
- this study indicates
- the author mentions
- the author presents
- the author proposes
- the author specifies

Results

To present the conclusions reached by the author that you are quoting, use signal phrases like:

- the author concludes
- this study confirms
- the author determines
- this study emphasizes
- this study points to
- this study proves
- the author recommends
- this study reveals
- this study shows

Summary

To describe a study, use signal phrases like:

- the author analyzes
- this study concentrates on
- the author evaluates
- the author examines
- the author explores
- this study focuses on
- this study is about
- the author is interested in
- the author studies

To know more about academic integrity and academic fraud, consult the University of Ottawa’s academic regulations (available online).

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