Choosing Verbs for Signal Phrases

When you create a signal phrase to introduce a quote, select a verb that matches the tone, attitude, or purpose of the author you are quoting. The signal phrase should be in present tense: The author claimed claims . . .

**Example #1:** Here is a passage from an article by Justin McCurry. It appeared in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, in March 2011:

> The power plant at the centre of the biggest civilian nuclear crisis in Japan’s history contained far more spent fuel rods than it was designed to store, while its technicians repeatedly failed to carry out mandatory safety checks, according to documents from the reactor's operator.

In quoting this passage, we need to create a signal phrase that indicates what McCurry is doing in this passage. We can infer from the passage that McCurry is reporting on a nuclear crisis in Japan. Therefore, we can use the verb “report” in our signal phrase:

> In his article in *The Guardian*, Justin McCurry reports, “The power plant at the centre of the biggest civilian nuclear crisis in Japan’s history contained far more spent fuel rods than it was designed to store, while its technicians repeatedly failed to carry out mandatory safety checks, according to documents from the reactor’s operator.”

**Example #2:** Here is a passage from an editorial (opinion piece) by Bob Herbert. It appeared in the *New York Times* in March 2011:

> If you really want to improve the education of poor children, you have to get them away from learning environments that are smothered by poverty. This is being done in some places, with impressive results. An important study conducted by the Century Foundation in Montgomery County, Md., showed that low-income students who happened to be enrolled in affluent elementary schools did much better than similarly low-income students in higher-poverty schools in the county.

What is Herbert doing in this passage? In the first sentence, he is presenting his own opinion. In the remaining sentences, he is providing support for his opinion, citing a study by the Century Foundation. In quoting Herbert, we need to select a verb that matches his purpose:

> In his editorial, Bob Herbert contends that “[i]f you really want to improve the education of poor children, you have to get them away from learning environments that are smothered by poverty.” To support his view, he cites a study by Maryland’s Century Foundation, which “showed that low-income students who happened to be enrolled in affluent elementary schools did much better than similarly low-income students in higher-poverty schools in the county.”

Note that “contends” is not the only verb we could choose, above. Some appropriate alternatives are “asserts,” “claims,” and “argues,” among others.
Here are some verbs that you might choose for signal phrases:

Author is stating a point (neutral tone):
- comments
- hints
- relates
- says
- continues
- mentions
- remarks
- states
- discusses
- notes
- replies
- writes
- explains
- points out
- reports
- expresses
- records
- responds

Author is making an observation or considering a point:
- analyzes
- evaluates
- reveals
- speculates
- assesses
- observes
- sees
- supposes

Author is presenting an opinion:
- advises
- concludes
- finds
- interprets
- suggests
- alleges
- contends
- holds
- maintains
- thinks
- argues
- decides
- indicates
- persuades
- urges
- asserts
- declares
- implies
- predicts
- warns
- believes
- emphasizes
- insists
- proposes

Author is supporting a point:
- adds
- demonstrates
- justifies
- defends
- describes
- shows
- exemplifies
- illustrates

Author is agreeing with an idea or someone else’s point:
- acknowledges
- affirms
- concurs
- confirms
- admits
- agrees
- concedes
- grants

Author is arguing against an idea or someone else’s point:
- accuses
- condemns
- deplores
- disputes
- belittles
- criticizes
- deprecates
- laments
- bemoans
- debates
- derides
- objects
- complains
- denies
- disagrees
- protests