

Academic Name-Dropping: Signal Phrases

Imagine you're walking down the Christy Mall with a friend, and the two of you are discussing whether or not you should go see a new movie. Suddenly, your friend stops talking, they pull aside a random passerby, and without introduction they share their opinion that the previous film by this director was a good watch. This mystery student then continues on their way, and your friend continues arguing that you should go with them to see the movie. How weird!

This is how your reader feels when they are reading your essay and you suddenly drop in a direct quote from an outside source without including a signal phrase or in-text citation! For example, let's say you were writing a paper about information literacy, and you were using an NPR article titled "A Conspiracy Video Teaches Kids A Lesson About Fake News":

- ▶ Checking that our information is accurate and unbiased is important, but how can we do it? Some people think it is difficult, but there are a few very easy things people can get into the habit of doing that don't take much time. "First off, he says, they have to check the authenticity of articles, pictures and videos." This is done by checking to see who the author is and when the article was published, and then looking closely at any references the author used to write the piece. Sometimes things are taken out of context, and it only takes a minute or two to check these things, but that's my opinion.

Where did that quote come from?! Who's talking, and then who is "he" that they are quoting? Is what follows immediately afterward a summary or the student's own ideas? Clearly, we need to right some citation wrongs. But what information do we need to include?

When it comes to in-text citation, here's the need-to-know info:

- ▶ Author's Name
 - ▶ Who's talking?! You don't want to suddenly have a quote or begin summarizing someone's ideas without letting a reader know who's taking center stage. You need to introduce them, mentioning their full name the first time you quote or summarize them and their last any time after that.
- ▶ Name of the Source
 - ▶ In order to introduce another source to a reader, you'll need to let them know how they're connected to your topic—what have they written that makes them worth listening to? Always introduce the name of the story, the article, the essay, the book, etc. the first time you are including information from that outside source.
 - ▶ You'll also want to clue a reader in on what kind of source the source is. How? By using quotation marks or italics! But which?
 - ▶ Longer Works: *O Pioneers!* (book), *The New York Times* (newspaper), *The Southern Literary Journal* (scholarly journal)
 - ▶ Smaller Works/Chapters in Longer: "The Raven" (poem), "The Literary Apprenticeship of Edgar Allan Poe" (scholarly article)

So, let's try that paragraph on information literacy again...

- ▶ Checking that our information is accurate and unbiased is important, but how can we do it? Some people think it is difficult, but there are a few very easy things people can get into the habit of doing that don't take much time. Eleanor Beardsley shares the advice of Thomas Huchon in her NPR article “A Conspiracy Video Teaches Kids A Lesson About Fake News,” “First off, he says, they have to check the authenticity of articles, pictures and videos.” Beardsley goes on to explain that this is done by checking to see who the author is and when the article was published, and then looking closely at any references the author used to write the piece. If we think about it, it only takes a moment to check beneath a headline or at the end of an article to see if the author and date is listed or if there are any articles linked as sources.

Now a reader isn't left in the dark about who's who and who's ideas are whose. We know that we're reading information from an NPR article by Eleanor Beardsley and that she is summarizing the words of Thomas Huchon, and then the student includes a summary of Beardsley's points.

Suggestions: Smooth Ways to Name-Drop

The most basic way to introduce a quote or summary from an outside source is to follow this formula: Author verbs, “...”

- ▶ Beardsley writes, “...”
- ▶ Beardsley asserts, “...”
- ▶ Beardsley explains, “...”

You can also try other short introductions, or signal phrases, that give readers a signal or sign that someone else is going to be speaking. This could be an introductory or transition phrase, a complete related sentence of your own followed by a colon before sharing a quote or summary, or a sentence where you blend to grammatical structure of your sentence and a sentence from a source.

- ▶ According to Beardsley's article, “...”
- ▶ The article “A Conspiracy Video Teaches Kids a Lesson About Fake News” provides teachers with a way to talk about hoaxes with students: “...” (Beardsley). ***
- ▶ On the other hand, Beardsley explains that in France “...”

***If you do not mention the author's name in the signal phrase, you'll need to include it in a parenthetical citation after the quote or summary.

Work Cited

- ▶ Beardsley, Eleanor. “A Conspiracy Video Teaches Kids a Lesson About Fake News.” NPR, 3 May 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/05/03/601839776/a-conspiracy-video-teaches-kids-a-lesson-about-fake-news>. Accessed 10 April 2020.