

Using reporting verbs to introduce evidence

Using reporting verbs will help you to introduce evidence in your assignments effectively. It is also a simple way to assist you to **practise academic integrity**, add flow to your writing, and **show your understanding** to the marker. This guide offers tips for using reporting verbs in your writing.

What is a reporting verb?

Reporting verbs are words that describe and report on others' work. Using reporting verbs can help you to blend sources into your writing.

Use reporting verbs to blend sources into your assignments effectively

When writing assignments at university, you will need to blend others' work into your writing. Reporting verbs are used in academic writing to discuss or report on others' ideas, research, and creative work that you use as evidence to back your argument or to illustrate your perspective.

Carefully selecting reporting verbs for use in assignments can help you to:

- blend sources into your writing
- characterise the work being introduced
- identify the views of authors used in your work
- demonstrate your understanding
- include your ideas and judgements.

Examples

Example one

Green (2009) says environmental concerns are overstated in many popular texts.

Using 'says' does little to either characterise the work being introduced, identify the view of the source's author, or show your judgements about the source. **Avoid using** 'says' when introducing evidence.

Example two

Green (2009) insists environmental concerns are over stated in many popular texts.

In this example (above), the writer **demonstrates understanding** by identifying the tone of the source (e.g. insistent).

Reporting verbs can be used to characterise sources and authors' views

Characterising a source demonstrates your understanding and judgement. The reporting verb used can show the marker your understanding of the source and your ability to make judgements about it.

Some reporting verbs can be used to characterise sources as neutral or objective

In scientific disciplines, objective, factual work based on observation and scientific rigour is highly valued as a credible source of knowledge on a given topic.

In assignments, you can include your judgement that a source is credible by using a neutral reporting verb. Using credible sources can add credibility to your own writing. Selecting the 'right' reporting verb can help you to show the marker the source is a credible source of evidence.

Example reporting verbs

observe(s), report(s), reveal(s), point(s) out, demonstrate(s), goes on to show, show(s), indicate(s), according to, describe(s), note(s), recommends, comment(s), reminds

Examples

Example one

Moreton (2011) **observes** significant changes in environmental politics over the last decade.

Example two

Davidson (2003) **reports** students have little trouble understanding how to use reporting verbs once they are given guidance.

Example three

Brownstone (2012) **points out** new students are often enthusiastic and engaged when they start their studies at university.

In the examples above, reporting verbs are used to:

- characterise sources as factual, neutral, and objective
- describe authors as objectively conveying facts and events
- show the writer's judgement that the source offers credible evidence.

Some reporting verbs can be used to characterise sources as offering credible arguments

In the Social Sciences, Cultural Studies, Politics, Law, Media Studies, and Creative Writing, sources that offer logical, well-evidenced arguments are viewed as offering credible knowledge on a given topic or issue.

Reporting verbs can be used to describe sources as offering a strong argument based on sound logic and evidence. Using these verbs shows you understand that while the source is rigorous or valid, it is still open to evaluation.

Examples

Example one

Dayson (2009) **argues** living sustainably is the most effective way to address environmental damage and social inequalities.

Example two

Mayberry (2012) **contends** learning how to write assignments at university can be both stressful and rewarding.

Example three

Eggleton (2010) **refutes** the idea that academic integrity is of little interest to most university students and academics.

These examples characterise the sources as taking a stance on a matter, and authors as offering their expert opinion (e.g. their interpretation of facts, events, and information).

In assignments, you can use reporting verbs to show your judgement that the source is not objective, but is still a credible source of knowledge. Expert opinion is valuable, while also being open to evaluation.

Some reporting verbs can be used to characterise sources as limited, biased or speculative

Reporting verbs can also be used to describe sources as being uncertain in their claims, offering a tightly focused analysis, or a hopeful interpretation. Depending on the discipline and the assignment, these qualities may make the source valuable (creative, insightful, and nuanced) or lacking credibility (uncertain, speculative, or overly biased).

Example reporting verbs

hypothesise(s), propose(s), recommend(s), suggest(s), insist(s), believe(s), strongly refute(s), imply(ies) assume(s), question(s) the view that, speculate(s), creatively rethink(s), postulate(s), moot(s)

Examples

Example one

Mook (2011) **speculates** about what it would be like to live in a sustainable society where environmental, social, economic, and cultural issues are equally important.

Example two

Yale (2002) **insists** banning offensive language during question time in parliament will help improve the reputation of politicians.

Example three

Smith (2010) **assumes** practising academic integrity is difficult for new students, and takes this as his starting point when **suggesting** how to support learners.

These examples use reporting verbs to describe **sources** and **author claims** as lacking evidence, biased or limited.

Depending on the discipline, assignment and topic, you might want to use reporting verbs to say the speculative nature of a source makes it **valuable**. After all, a speculative source explores possibilities rather than certainties and this can be viewed as both a 'good' or 'bad' thing depending on your position. Whether you think the source is 'hopeful' and 'visionary in the way it explores possibilities' or 'lacking evidence' and 'overly optimistic', reporting verbs can help you show **your understanding** and **add your ideas, and judgements**.

More specific examples of using reporting verbs

There are many ways to use reporting verbs to introduce sources into your writing, and show your understanding of others' work. The examples below will help you to use reporting verbs to describe **an author's position and beliefs** on an issue, and to **describe what they are doing in a source**.

- Verbs to indicate the author **disagrees or questions**:
doubt(s), question(s), disagree(s), refute(s), reject(s), discard(s), attack(s), complain(s), dismiss(es).
- Verbs to indicate the **author agrees**:
concede(s), validate(s), admit(s), support(s), agree(s), extol(s), confirm(s), praise(s), acknowledge(s), accept(s), recognise(s).
- Verbs to indicate the **author evaluates or examines**:
analyse(s), explore(s), unpack(s), interpret(s), critique(s), compare(s), contrast(s), investigate(s), examine(s), judge(s), assess(es), scrutinise(s), understand(s), find(s).
- Verbs to indicate the **author proves something**:
confirm(s), substantiate(s), prove(s), verify(ies), establish(es).
- Verbs to **indicate the author's beliefs**:
hope(s), believe(s), insist(s), feel(s), hold(s), know(s), maintain(s), assume(s), think(s), express(es).
- Verbs to indicate **what the author did to make the knowledge**:
observe(s), analyse(s), experiment(s), examine(s), study, estimate(s).

Tips when using reporting verbs in assignments

- Avoid using 'says' when introducing sources into your writing.
- Try not to use the same couple of reporting verbs throughout the assignment. Markers may interpret this as lack of effort or skill on your part.
- Check the dictionary meaning of reporting verbs to make sure they fit in with the rest of the sentence and convey your ideas and judgements about the source.
- Use present tense when using reporting verbs. It is usual in academic writing to use present tense when introducing and discussing others' work, even if it was published a long time ago. Check this with your teacher to see if this is the case in your discipline.
- Double check reporting verbs during editing phases.

See also Academic Phrasebank at <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/referring-to-sources/>