**Author prominent citations and ‘reporting verbs’**

Note that author prominent citations are followed by ‘reporting’ verbs which give you an opportunity to comment on the perspective of the author.

Lukas et al. (2005) *evaluated* venous leg ulcers and their healing. [Nursing]  
Wiltshire (2007) *compared* two techniques for identifying … [Chemistry]

Your choice of reporting verb shows your attitude to the research. These choices are determined by your discipline, the meaning of the verb and if the claims are accepted or not.

1. **Disciplinary variation [[1]](#footnote-1)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Discipline | Most frequent reporting verbs |
| Biology  Electronic engineering Mechanical engineering Marketing Applied linguistics Sociology Philosophy | *describe, find, report, show, suggest, observe  propose, use, describe, show, publish describe, show, report, discuss, develop, study suggest, argue, demonstrate, propose, show suggest, argue, show, explain, find, point out argue, suggest, describe, note, analyse, discuss say, suggest, argue, claim, point out, propose, think* |
| Overall | *suggest, find, show, describe, propose, report* |

1. **Meaning**

**Table 1** Meaning of some commonly used reporting verbs

(Adapted Temple University Writing Center 2005, accessed 11 February 2005, <http://www.temple.edu/writingctr/handouts/thesisandargument/vividverbs.htm>)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reporting verb | Meaning *The author…* |
| *agrees* | *echoes a viewpoint already established in your paper* |
| *argue* | *takes a stance on an issue by using evidence and logic* |
| *assert* | *strongly suggests that an idea or theory is true* |
| *assume* | *examines the author’s underlying reasons for making a particular claim, often followed by an explanation of why this assumption is accurate* |
| *claim* | *makes a statement that is not supported with evidence* |
| *commend* | *praises someone or assigns responsibility for a positive outcome* |
| *conclude* | *reaches a decision after studying the topic carefully* |
| *consider* | *thinks about other ideas or counterarguments* |
| *criticise* | *points out weaknesses or flaws in another researcher’s arguments or actions* |
| *decide* | *reaches a conclusion after studying the topic carefully* |
| *define* | *provides a specific meaning to a given term or idea* |
| *demonstrate* | *convinces you that something is true/believable* |
| *describe* | *provides details of a situation or process* |
| *determine* | *reaches a conclusion after careful study* |
| *discover* | *finds out something new* |
| *doubt* | *is uncertain about a particular idea or argument* |
| Reporting verb | Meaning *The author…* |
| *evaluate* | *makes a judgement or worth regarding a topic* |
| *explain* | *provides reasons for or causes of a situation* |
| *hypothesise* | *proposes an original argument* |
| *imply* | *suggests a point of view, without making the point directly* |
| *indicate* | *presents information* [neutral] |
| *infer* | *reaches a conclusion based on information about a topic* |
| *maintain* | *takes a stand on the issue* [like ‘claim’] |
| *overlook* | *ignores some important ideas or theory* |
| *present* | *provides information [like ‘indicate’, neutral]* |
| *presume* | *makes an assumption and you examine the underlying reasons for making a claim; you might follow this comment with an explanation of why this presumption is accurate or inaccurate* |
| *propose* | *provides a new idea or perspective* |
| *prove* | *definitely supports his/her argument* |
| *refute* | *persuades you that another researcher is wrong* |
| *reveal* | *unveils new information* |
| *show* | *convinces you of an idea and you agree* |
| *state* | *provides information* [neutral] |
| *suggest* | *presents an idea but is not convincing* |
| *views* | *introduces source materials that seem based on opinions rather than argument* [like ‘believe’] |

1. **Type of claim**

Reporting verbs can show your viewpoint of the research and the author’s viewpoint, i.e. they can convey your positive, neutral or negative attitudes of the study depending on whether you accept the research claims or not. Therefore, by careful selection of reporting verbs you can present your argument or point of view. Some of these verbs are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Attitudes associated with reporting verbs

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Positive or supportive | Neutral | Negative or incorrect |
| *accepts, acknowledges, affirms, agrees, asserts,  defines, demonstrates,  explains, identifies, observes, outlines, recommends, shows, suggests, thinks, urges, …* | *adds, argues, clarifies, concludes, finds,  indicates, presents,  reports, states, …* | *attacks, challenges, claims, confuses, disagrees,  disregards, ignores,  opposes, overlooks, questions, rejects, warns,…* |

**Follow-up** –When reading research, note when and what reporting verbs are used. Add effective expressions and verbs to your collection of expressions to be ‘recycled’.

**More on verbs – what verbs to use in the literature review**

A reminder about verb tenses:

* present perfect—general reference to the literature ‘Several studies have shown that …’
* past—specific reference to a study
* present—specific reference to a study IF the ideas at still relevant and factual

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Verb form** |  | **Example** | **Comments** |
| **Tense**   * Present * Past * Present perfect   **Modal auxiliaries** (‘may’, ‘would’, ‘could’) |  | **Information prominent**  ***Accepted scientific fact – present tense***  Petri nets *are* a powerful graphical modelling tool (Wu 2010).  **Weak author prominent**  **Research of several authors – present perfect**  Several researchers *have discriminated* biological soil crust spectral characteristics using both field and laboratory analysis (Tromp & Steenis 1996; Karmieli et al. 1999).  Two broad types of interactive map *have been developed* by commercial GIS vendors (Plewe 1997; Toon 1997).  **General statements about research**  **Describing the level of research activity—present perfect tense**  Little research *has been done* using this new strain of …  **Author prominent**  ***Fact—present tense***  Skillen (2003) showed that aluminium in seawater is regulated by a thermodynamic balance (TB).  **Limited to specific or individual studies—past tense**  Skillen (2004) found that aluminium in seawater *was regulated* by a TB.  **If findings presented tentatively—modals**  Skillen (2005) suggested that aluminium in seawater *may be regulated* by a TB. | **Note:** verb tense changes in the literature review, and indeed in some sentences (Weissberg & Buker 1990, p. 53)  *Complement verb* form depends on focus: as fact, limited, tentative (p. 55-56) |

**This resource was produced by Dr Monica Behrend.**

1. Hyland, K 2000, *Disciplinary discourse: social interactions in academic writing*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)