REPORTING VERBS

Academic writing requires you to use citations to refer to the original source when you have used someone else’s ideas or concepts in your writing. One of the most common ways to incorporate these citations into your writing is to use reporting verbs to present the information. There is a wide variety of reporting verbs in the English language, see examples at https://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/english/gepdf/Reporting%20verbs_guidelines.pdf

Advanced ways to show your attitude

Reporting verbs are a way for you, the writer, to show your attitude towards the source of information you are citing. These attitudes are either ‘positive’, ‘negative’ or ‘neutral’.

Do you agree with what the author has said? If so, use reporting verbs with a positive meaning to them. Here are some reporting verbs that tend to be positive:

acknowledges affirms analyses
applauds argues contends
explains identifies observes
persuades proves supports

Do you disagree with what the author has said? In this case, you can use a negative reporting verb to indicate this. Here are some reporting verbs used when there is a belief that the literature is incorrect.

accuses alleges apologises
asserts comments confuses
doubts guesses hopes
intimates questions speculates

Perhaps you don’t feel positive or negative about the source you are citing. In this situation, you should use a neutral reporting verb. Here are some reporting verbs that tend to be neutral:

accepts acknowledges adds
agrees assures claims
concludes confirms describes
expresses maintains recognises
reports says thinks

Keep in mind that there are many more reporting verbs you can use to more fully express how you feel about the sources you are using in your essays and papers.

Adapted from: The Independent Learning Centre, Chinese University, Hong Kong, n.d. Reporting verbs, viewed 26 October 2012
REPORTING VERBS AND YOUR ‘WRITER’S’ VOICE

Academic writing at university normally requires you to use multiple information sources, and to evaluate the quality of their ideas. One important tool for doing this is reporting verbs.

Reporting verbs tell us that someone said something. However, careful selection of reporting verbs can help show your assessment of the quality of what they have said. This is a vital academic skill. It not only helps turn ordinary Pass-level work into much better work, but it also develops your critical thinking skills.

Reporting verbs can show your opinion of others’ ideas:

- a belief that the literature is correct (stronger position)
- a neutral attitude towards the veracity of the literature (i.e. neither correct nor incorrect – neutral position)
- a belief that the literature is incorrect (weaker position)

Common reporting verbs for academic writing

It is important you understand and know how to use the verb correctly before placing it in a sentence and that you use past or present tense as appropriate. Here is a list of possible reporting verbs which you can use to indicate your viewpoint:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>area</th>
<th>weaker position</th>
<th>neutral position</th>
<th>stronger position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>addition</td>
<td></td>
<td>adds</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>advice</td>
<td></td>
<td>advises</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>agreement</td>
<td>admits, concedes</td>
<td>accepts, acknowledges, agrees, concurs, confirms, recognises</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>argument/persuasion</td>
<td>apologises</td>
<td>assures, encourages, interprets, justifies, reasons</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>believing</td>
<td>guesses, hopes, imagines</td>
<td>believes, claims, declares, expresses, feels, holds, knows, maintains, professes, subscribes to, thinks</td>
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<tr>
<td>conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td>concludes, discovers, finds, infers, realises</td>
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<tr>
<td>disagreement/questioning</td>
<td>doubts, questions</td>
<td>challenges, debates, disagrees, questions, requests, wonders</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>discussion</td>
<td>comments</td>
<td>discusses, explores</td>
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</table>
The grammar of reporting verbs

Reporting verbs have simple basic grammar. However, it can be confusing because there are two basic patterns. Some reporting verbs belong to one pattern, some to the other, and some to both.

**Pattern 1: Verb + Noun (noun phrase)**

The authors *show the devastating results of this policy* (Smith & Jones 2008, p. 12).

Gillard (2012) *indicated her negative opinion of Abbott’s proposal*.

Pinker (2002) frequently *approves of Chomsky’s theories*.

**Pattern 2: Verb + That + clause (i.e. sentence)**

The authors *show that this policy had devastating results* (Smith & Jones 2008, p. 12).

Gillard (2012) *indicated that Abbott’s proposal was untenable in her opinion*.

**Tense**

Reporting verbs are normally present simple – especially for recent articles and books:

*Turner (2010) states that the modern state wields more power in new ways.*

However, use the past tense if presenting the results of past research – even in recent literature:

*The groups observed during the research showed a range of leadership styles (Kang 2006).*
References
