

Reporting verbs

Verbs are words in a sentence that tell us that some *action* is occurring. *Reporting verbs* tell us that action is being carried out by someone else. In the university context, these 'actions' usually involve someone—a scholar—adopting an idea or applying a theory (they are both reporting verbs!).

In academic writing, reporting verbs are used to a) *outline, state* or *describe* literature; b) *comment* on the ideas of others; c) *evaluate* and d) *critique* work or to e) *endorse* work. Their use is critical in reporting academic information.

Here are some examples of each, in which the reporting verb is underlined:

Using reporting verbs	
Stating ideas in literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jones (1989) <u>claims</u> that ... Smith (2000) <u>asserts</u> ...
Commenting on literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jones (1989) <u>defines</u> X as ... Whereas Smith (2000) <u>disputes</u> ...
Evaluating literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jones (1989) <u>accepts</u> the idea that ... Smith's (2000) work <u>represents</u> the ...
Critiquing literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jones (1989) <u>argues*</u> that ... however, this can be disputed as ... Smith (2000) <u>makes*</u> the point that... By contrast, this can be ... Henderson (1999) <u>asserts*</u> that ... However, this is debatable as... <p>*NB: it is important to state the idea before disagreeing with it.</p>
Endorsing literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jones (1989) correctly <u>notes</u> that ... Smith (2000) <u>applauds</u> ...

Types of reporting verbs

There are three main types of reporting verbs, which:

- Follow the reporting verb with a preposition (*of, in, by, between, from, towards, under, etc.*).
- Follow the verb with a noun or gerund (the 'ing' form of verb, e.g., '*analysing*').
- Follow the verb with the word 'that'.

Turn the page for examples of the main types of reporting verbs.

Strength of reporting verbs

Reporting verbs have various degrees of *strength*. A verb form can provide a strong position, a neutral position and a weak position. It is important to choose the right degree of strength for your purpose.

For example, if you say '*Smith (1989) notes that X*' it is neutral with respect to whether Smith's endorses X or not (it can be made less neutral by adding '*correctly notes*'). By contrast, if you write '*Smith (1989) applauds the use of X*' or '*Smith (1989) points out that X*' you are making it clear that Smith endorses X (very strongly in the former case). By contrast, if you say '*Smith (1989) questions the veracity of X*' it is clear that Smith is doubtful about X, i.e., it is weak endorsement. For more on degrees of strength of reporting verbs, see University of Adelaide (2014).

Ask yourself when reporting on literature: a) Have I varied the use of reporting verbs? b) Have I chosen the most appropriate reporting verb? c) Have I considered the *strength* of the reporting verb?

Reporting verbs

The most commonly used examples are in **bold**. This is not a complete list.

Verb + 'ing' form + noun	Verb + preposition	Verb + that
analyses (or 'ing' form) + noun appraises assesses considers contradicts critiques debates describes disclaims discusses disregards evaluates examines explores expresses highlights identifies illustrates investigates justifies lists opposes outlines presents questions refutes rejects studies supports uses validates verifies <u>Other examples:</u> ... analyses X in respect of analysing the best approach to appraises the view that appraising the approach to... ... assesses the claim that assessing X's theory in terms of considers the approach of considering the view that contradicts X's assertion that contradicting the view that critiques the theory of X in terms of critiquing X's claim that debates the view that describes the theory in terms of describing the approach of discards the view that discarding previous views of ...	defines (idea)...as... proposes ... as ... determines ...as ... know ... as ... mentions ... as ... labels ... as ... declares ... as ... establishes ... as ... TO alludes to ... compares ... to ... objects ... to... subscribes ... to ... challenges ... to ... agree to... claim to ... attempt to ... appear to ... OF accuses ... of warns ... of ... approves of ... thinks of ... WITH confuses ... with... contrasts ...with... disagrees with ... concurr with... interferes with ... FOR apologies for... blames...for ... criticises ... for IN TERMS OF... defines ... in terms of ... proposes ... in terms of ... determines ... in terms of ... alludes ... in terms of ... declares ... in terms of ... establishes ... in terms of ...	adds that... admits that... accept that... acknowledge advise advocate agree allege argue articulates asserts believes claim clarifies comment concede conclude confirms find guarantee guess hope hypothesises imply indicate infer inform insist justify maintain note observe persuade points out promise propose proves questions recognises recommends reminds reports reveals shows speculates states stresses suggests suspects tells theorises thinks understands

Source: University of Adelaide. (2014). *Verbs for reporting*. Writing Centre Learning Guide.
<https://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/sites/default/files/docs/learningguide-verbsforreporting.pdf>

