

What are 'reporting verbs', and when do I need to use them?

'Reporting verbs' are verbs such as *discuss* and *argue*. They are often used when you explain or discuss the ideas or research of other writers. When you quote, paraphrase or summarise another writer, you must always include a reference. You can also use a reporting verb or expression.

How do I know which reporting verb to use?

It depends on your purpose. Some reporting verbs are used when you want to give the information without expressing an opinion about it. Some show **your writer's*** opinion about the information. Some can be used to show whether you think the information is true or not. Some reporting verbs highlight your writer's thinking or research methods.

What do I need to know to use reporting verbs in a sentence?

You need to know what grammatical structure usually follows that verb. You also need to decide which tense is best. The simple present, present perfect and simple past are the three tenses most commonly used.

* In this helpsheet, 'your writer' means the person who wrote the book or article you are using information from.

1. You want to tell your reader **WHAT YOUR WRITER SAYS**, without giving your own opinion about the information.

MEANING	VERB	GRAMMAR	EXAMPLE
<i>Your writer presents the information as fact.</i>	state	<i>Author (date) states that [+ SUBJECT + VERB +...]</i>	Castles and Miller (2003) state that mass migration to North America between 1850 and 1915 was affected by industrialisation.
<i>Your writer makes something clear, or gives details of how or why something happens.</i>	explain	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Author (date) explains that [+ SUBJECT + VERB +...]</i> <i>Author (date) explains [NOUN PHRASE]</i> 	<p>Mithen (1999) explains that all cultures have a classification scheme for objects in the natural world.</p> <p>Berger and Mesten (1998) explain the differences in the efficiencies of financial institutions.</p>
<i>Your writer explains the exact meaning of a word or term.</i>	define	<i>Author (date) defines [WORD] as ...</i>	Casperson, Powell and Christensen (1985) define physical activity as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure.
<i>Your writer talks about an idea or topic in detail.</i>	discuss	<i>Author (date) discusses [NOUN PHRASE]</i>	Lund (1991) discusses the relationship between chronic pain and activity level.
<i>Your writer draws attention to an important feature of an idea or topic.</i>	note	<i>Author (date) notes that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]</i>	Goffman (1977) notes that advertisements do not depict how men and women actually behave.
<i>Your writer considers an idea or topic very carefully.</i>	examine	<i>Author (date) examines [NOUN PHRASE]</i>	Doney and Cannon (1997) examine the role of trust in buyer-seller relationships.
<p><i>According to... is also used to report another writer's ideas in a neutral way.</i></p> <p>* When you use according to..., do not use a reporting verb.</p>	according to	<i>According to Author (date), [+ SUBJECT + VERB +...]</i>	According to Goffman (1977), advertisements do not depict how men and women actually behave.

Special note

Although these verbs express your writer's information in a neutral way, you can of course present your own opinion in the next sentence.

2. You want to show YOUR OWN VIEW about the information your writer presents.

2a. You think the information your writer presents is TRUE.

Meaning	Verb	Grammar	Example
You think your writer proves something, or makes something clear.	show	Author (date) shows that [+SUBJECT + VERB +...]	Lim et al (2005) show that some microRNAs downregulate large numbers of target mRNAs.
You think your writer makes a fact or theory clear.	demonstrate	1. Author (date) demonstrates that [+SUBJECT + VERB +...] 2. Author (date) demonstrates [NOUN PHRASE]	Stubhaug et al (1997) demonstrate that ketamine is a powerful suppressor of pain following surgery. Stubhaug et al (1997) demonstrate the effectiveness of ketamine for pain suppression.
You think your writer shows that something is definitely true.	prove	Author (date) proves that [+SUBJECT + VERB +...]	Dugan and Greinstein (1991) prove that factorisation holds for Green functions.

Special note

You can also show agreement by using “As Author (date) states/argues/explains/notes...[+SUBJECT + VERB +...]”.

2b. You think the information your writer presents is FALSE or PROBLEMATIC.

Meaning	Verb	Grammar	Example
You think your writer makes a topic or an idea complicated or unclear.	confuse	Author (date) confuses [NOUN PHRASE]	Rosen (2002) confuses the issue by inaccurately describing the process.
You think your writer has ignored an important point.	disregard	Author (date) disregards [NOUN PHRASE]	Mintzberg (1987) disregards the social context in which management takes place.
You think your writer has explained an idea or another writer wrongly.	misrepresent	Author (date) misrepresents [NOUN PHRASE]	Uriagereka (1998) misrepresents the work on comparative economy conditions in Johnson and Lappin (1997, 1999).

3. You want to show WHAT YOUR WRITER THINKS about the information.

3a. Your writer thinks the information is TRUE or VALID.

Meaning	Verb	Grammar	Example
Your writer gives their opinion or develops a theory about a topic.	argue	<i>Author (date)</i> argues that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]	Mithen (1999) argues that the human mind is not as simple as a computer.
Your writer says that something is true, or states it as a fact.	claim	<i>Author (date)</i> claims that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]	De Beauvoir (1949) claims that “one is not born, but, rather, <i>becomes</i> a woman.”
Your writer wants to draw attention to the information.	point out	<i>Author (date)</i> points out that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]	Potterat (2001) points out that the city of Baltimore embarked on a new public housing policy in the mid-1990s.
Your writer has examined a topic, and reached a final opinion about it.	conclude	<i>Author (date)</i> concludes that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]	Malkiel (2003) concludes that the efficient market hypothesis remains valid.
Your writer thinks that the information is possibly or probably true.	suggest	<i>Author (date)</i> suggests that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]	Johnson and Birkland (2003) suggest that poor working conditions explain teachers’ reluctance to work in schools in remote areas.
Your writer accepts or admits that something is true.	acknowledge	<i>Author (date)</i> acknowledges that [+SUBJECT + VERB +...]	Wolf-Maier et al (2003) acknowledge that methodological issues could undermine the validity of their results.

3b. Your writer thinks the information is FALSE or PROBLEMATIC.

Meaning	Verb	Grammar	Example
Your writer completely does not accept or agree with an idea.	reject	<i>Author (date)</i> rejects [NOUN PHRASE]	Carneiro (1970) rejects the belief that the state arose through a historical accident.
Your writer does not agree with an idea.	disagree	<i>Author (date)</i> disagrees with [NOUN PHRASE]	Wilkes, Doblin and Shapiro (1992) disagree with the claim that the drug is more effective.
Your writer questions an idea.	challenge	<i>Author (date)</i> challenges [NOUN PHRASE]	Sen (2006) challenges Huntington’s argument.
Your writer completely does not accept or agree with an idea.	dismiss	<i>Author (date)</i> dismisses [NOUN PHRASE]	Husain (1985) dismisses the claim that the Western understanding of science is the only valid one.

4. You want to show what YOUR WRITER THOUGHT or DID.

MEANING	VERB	GRAMMAR	EXAMPLE
Your writer says something indirectly.	imply	<i>Author (date) implies that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]</i>	Romer (1987) implies that higher savings rates lead to higher growth rates.
Your writer holds an opinion strongly.	believe	<i>Author (date) believes that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]</i>	Skinner (1957) believed that behavioral response can be fully explained by reinforcement alone.
Your writer decides how important or useful something is, after carefully studying its good and bad features.	evaluate	<i>Author (date) evaluates [NOUN PHRASE]</i>	Donabedian (2005) evaluated current methods for assessing the quality of medical care.
Your writer considers something carefully and makes a judgement about it.	assess	<i>Author (date) assesses [NOUN PHRASE]</i>	Grisso, Appelbaum and Hill-Fotouhi (1995) assessed patients' competence to make treatment decisions.
Your writer talks about an idea or topic in detail.	focus on	<i>Author (date) focuses on [NOUN PHRASE]</i>	Dunning and Lundan (1993) focus on how the behaviour of multinational enterprises may affect the global economy.
Your writer finds out how big or great something is.	measure	<i>Author (date) measures [NOUN PHRASE]</i>	Benzie and Strain (1996) measured the ferric reducing ability of plasma.
Your writer uses mathematical processes to find a number or amount.	calculate	<i>Author (date) calculates [NOUN PHRASE]</i>	Swope et al (1982) calculated the average potential energy of a cluster of molecules as a function of temperature.
Your writer studies something and reaches a conclusion.	find	<i>Author (date) finds that [+ SUBJECT + VERB + ...]</i>	Wermers (2003) found that high-turnover funds provide higher returns.

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