English Grammar

A Student's Guide to Using 'Verbs' in Academic Writing

http://www.efltutoring.com/
In academic writing, there is an important group of verbs called 'reporting verbs'

Explanation

The term 'reporting verb' is used to talk about a verb which introduces information that is written by another author. An author's name is often the subject of the verb. The object or complement of a reporting verb usually contains information from an academic text.
Reporting verbs can be grouped as follows:

'Claims & Results'
- These verbs are more 'objective'
- They report information without expressing opinion

'Knowing & Thinking'
- These verbs can be 'evaluative'
- They can show an opinion or value judgement
Common verbs for reporting claims and results

Examples

analyse; argue; assert; claim; conclude; contend; demonstrate; describe; develop; discuss; examine; expand; explain; find; illustrate; maintain; note; observe; point out; propose; provide; report; show; state; study; suggest;
Verbs expressing 'knowing' or 'thinking'

Examples

assume; believe; consider; estimate; feel; know; presume; suppose; think; understand
Common verbs for reporting claims (i.e. statements) based on theory or research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key claims</th>
<th>Supporting points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assert</td>
<td>note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>claim</td>
<td>observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state</td>
<td>point out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© B. Howarth 2012
It can be useful to report a main claim then follow with an additional or supporting point.

**Example**

Smith (2012) **claims** that poor diet is a key cause of obesity. He **notes** that obesity is a major issue in developing countries.

**Note:** The verb 'claim' can be used to introduce a main statement while the verb 'note' is used to add an additional, related point.
Common verbs for reporting the results of experiments and related conclusions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results/Findings</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate</td>
<td>conclude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find</td>
<td>indicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>show</td>
<td>suggest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© B. Howarth 2012
It can be useful to report a result then follow with a conclusion drawn from that result

Example

In a study to investigate obesity, Smith (2012) showed that young people who ate fast food more than 3 times a week were heavier than young people who ate meals at home. This finding suggests that obesity is associated with eating fast food.
Research papers may report other types of results such as processes. Useful verbs include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2012)</td>
<td>identifies 3 phases of social adaptation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The verb 'mention' is unsuitable for reporting the results of experiments and studies

**Mention**

Smith (2010) mentioned three factors which can lead to obesity.

The verb 'mention' makes the 'three factors' seem unimportant and not supported by evidence or analysis.
Some verbs should not be used too often

Say

It is acceptable to use 'say' to introduce a direct quotation from an important person in a field, such as Chief Executive of a company. However, frequent use of the verb 'say' can make a piece of writing sound informal. Therefore, 'say' should not be used too often.
There are specific grammatical patterns for reporting verbs. The most common include:

- Reporting verb + 'that'-clause
- Reporting verb + noun phrase
- Reporting verb + object + infinitive

Note: The pattern 'Reporting verb + object + infinitive' is more common with verbs of knowing and believing
Some reporting verbs for 'claims & results' can only be followed by a noun phrase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010) describes</td>
<td>criminal behaviour in the young.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This group of verbs cannot be followed by a 'that'-clause or the pattern, object + infinitive

Examples

✗ Smith (2012) describes that criminal behaviour exists in the young.

✗ Smith (2012) examines factors to affect youth crime.
Some reporting verbs for 'claims & results' are typically followed by a 'that'-clause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>'that'-clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010) asserts</td>
<td>that a structured daily routine is essential for young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010) claims</td>
<td>that crime is prevalent among the young.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010) concludes</td>
<td>that youth crime is preventable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some reporting verbs for 'claims & results' are typically followed by a 'that'-clause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>'that'-clause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010)</td>
<td>contends that youth crime is preventable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010)</td>
<td>states that crime is prevalent among the young.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This group of verbs cannot be followed by a noun-phrase

Examples

✗ Smith (2012) asserts the need for a structured daily routine for young people.

✗ Smith (2012) claims the prevalence of crime among the young.

✗ Smith (2012) concludes the prevention of youth crime.
This group of verbs cannot be followed by a noun-phrase

Examples

✗ Smith (2012) asserts the need for a structured daily routine for young people.

✗ Smith (2012) claims the prevalence of crime among the young.

✗ Smith (2012) concludes the prevention of youth crime.
In the active voice, verbs of knowing & thinking can be followed by a 'that'-clause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>'that'</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assume</td>
<td>that</td>
<td>something</td>
<td>is..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consider</td>
<td>something</td>
<td>was..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suppose</td>
<td></td>
<td>has been..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pattern: verb + 'that'-clause

Examples

Psychologists assume [verb] that the mind exists ['that'-clause].

People consider [verb] that the Internet has been an invaluable tool in modern life ['that'-clause].

The judge supposed [verb] that the evidence was correct ['that'-clause].
In the active voice, verbs of knowing & thinking can be followed by: 'verb' + 'object' + 'infinitive'
Structure: verb [v], object [obj], infinitive [inf]

Examples

Psychologists assume [v] the mind [obj] to exist [inf].

People consider [v] the internet [obj] to be [inf] invaluable in everyday life.

The judge supposed [v] the evidence [obj] to be [inf] correct.
In the active voice, the pattern; verb + 'that'-clause is 'preferred' (i.e. more common)

Examples

✔️✔️ Psychologists assume that the mind exists
✔️ Psychologists assume the mind to exist

Note: Both sentences are grammatically correct. However, the first sentence pattern is used more often and is therefore more typical.
In the passive voice, the pattern; verb + infinitive is 'preferred' (i.e. more common)

Examples

✅ ✅ The mind is assumed to exist

✅ That the mind exists is assumed

Note: Both sentences are grammatically correct. However, the first sentence pattern is used more often and is therefore more typical.
However, in the passive voice, a 'that'-clause is common after 'impersonal it'

Examples

✔✔✔ It is assumed that the mind exists.
✔✔ The mind is assumed to exist.
✔ That the mind exists is assumed.

Note: Both sentences are grammatically correct. However, the first sentence pattern is 'preferred' and is more common.
References


Thank you for watching!

Dr Barbara Howarth