

# Reporting verbs

Academic writers use particular words to enhance their analysis when citing authors.

For example:

Doolan (2019:3) **suggests** that ...

Custance **argues** that ...<sup>36</sup>

Wright-Neville (2020) **claims** that this approach is ...

These words are called **reporting verbs** because they report what others have said. You can recognise a reporting verb by substituting it with the word **says** (as in 'Doolan says ...'). If it still makes sense, you have identified a reporting verb.

Reporting verbs are important to use in your academic writing because they communicate *your analysis and understanding* of the information you are citing.

## What is the effect of using different reporting verbs?

As a writer, you must carefully consider your verb choices to reflect your understanding and analysis of your sources.

Consider the reporting verb in the following sentence:

Stevenson (2020:23) **says** that racism is deeply embedded in our political and legal frameworks.



# Referencing explained | Reporting verbs

## Deakin guide to referencing

The reporting verb **says** is neutral. It simply tells us that this idea is attributable to the author, Stevenson. What would happen if a different reporting verb was chosen?

How would the meaning and intention of the sentence shift if you replaced **says** with one of the following reporting verbs?

acknowledges    argues    demonstrates    claims    suggests    alleges    speculates

Each of these reporting verbs adds a different nuance to the meaning of this sentence.

You should think about your objective as a writer when selecting a reporting verb. Ask yourself: Why have I chosen this source? and What do I want to say about it?

Reporting verb	Objective
Stevenson (2020:23) <b>acknowledges</b> that racism is deeply embedded in our political and legal frameworks.	<i>The writer implies that they agree with Stevenson on an established fact.</i>
Stevenson (2020:23) <b>demonstrates</b> that racism is deeply embedded in our political and legal frameworks.	<i>The writer is showing they believe that Stevenson has conclusively proven a point.</i>
Stevenson (2020:23) <b>alleges</b> that racism is deeply embedded in our political and legal frameworks.	<i>The writer is undermining Stevenson's idea by suggesting this is an unproven opinion.</i>



## Discussing your sources with reporting verbs

You can also use reporting verbs to **compare and contrast** your sources.

In the following example, the reporting verbs *claims* and *warns* have been used to convey the writer's analysis of Smith and Nguyen's positions.

While Smith (2010) **claims** that climate change presents little threat, Nguyen (2017) **warns** that the effect on the global economy will be devastating.

Note how the use of the strong verb *warns* imbues Nguyen's position with more authority, while the use of *claims* implies that Smith is making an assertion without any convincing evidence.

## Emphasising the author or the idea

The examples of reporting verbs so far have been **author-prominent citations** – that is, with the inclusion of the author's name followed by a reporting verb. For example: *Doolan (2019) suggests ...*

These are useful for sentences where you want to emphasise the author in your writing; however, you are unlikely to do this for every citation.

Reporting verbs can also be used for **idea-prominent citations**, which emphasise the idea or findings of a study rather than the author. Note that for author-date styles of referencing, such as Harvard, this usually means placing the author names in brackets at the end of the sentence.

Racism **is claimed** to be deeply embedded in our political and legal frameworks (Custance 2017; Howard and Roberts 2019; Grivas 2020).

Long-term low-dose exposure **was shown** to alter the signaling system between the hypothalamus and pituitary gland.<sup>6</sup>



## Reporting verbs and transitional phrases

Reporting verbs are often used in conjunction with **transitional phrases** such as: *while*, *however*, or *although*. These can be used to compare and contrast sources and build a stronger argument.

Jones (2017:14) **argues** that combatting inequality is a personal responsibility. **However**, Stevenson (2020:23) counters this position by **highlighting** the ways that racism is deeply embedded in our political and legal frameworks.

**While** Smith (2010) **claims** that climate change presents little threat, Nguyen (2011) **warns** that the effect on the global economy will be devastating.

**Although** Smith (2010) **suggests** that climate change presents little threat, **it should be noted that** Nguyen (2011) **highlights** the need to prepare for a devastating effect on the global economy.

Learn more about transitional phrases in [Referencing explained: Using sources](#)

## In summary...

Reporting verbs are important in your writing for:

- reporting your sources
- interpreting an author's intention
- evaluating the strength of evidence in your sources
- comparing or contrasting authors' positions
- making your own position clear to your reader.

## Still have questions? We're here to help!

- Email [Study Support](#)
- Discuss your work with a [Writing Mentor](#) or [Language and Learning Adviser](#)



## List of reporting verbs and their uses

- Look out for the use of reporting verbs in your unit readings.
- Think about how and why their authors have chosen to use them.
- Consider how you will use these reporting verbs in your own writing.
- Which reporting verbs can be used for sources that support your own response?
- Which reporting verbs can be used with sources that you disagree with, reject or are sceptical about?

claim	demonstrate	speculate
suggest	describe	warn
propose	clarify	consider
recommend	disagree	agree
argue that	acknowledge	support
note	emphasise	remark
explain	propose	suggest
highlight	question	illustrate
admit	stress	describe
affirm	show	refute

- Read on to learn more about how some of these reporting verbs can be used.
- Find further examples in the [University of Manchester Academic Phrasebank](https://www.manchester.ac.uk/academic-phrasebank/).



\* Note: the examples below demonstrate a variety of referencing styles used at Deakin. Check your unit guide for your required style.

Reporting verb	Possible uses
<p><b>Argue</b></p> <p>Jin <b>has argued</b> that providing safe injecting spaces is the best way to respond to the current wave of drug overdoses [13].</p>	<p>Use this verb to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• persuade readers that something is true by using evidence and logic (without wanting to say whether you agree or not).</li><li>• lead into a debate, for example, when you are comparing or contrasting different positions.</li></ul>
<p><b>Challenge, Question, Doubt</b></p> <p>Hughes (1998) <b>challenged</b> the common belief that employees are most strongly motivated by money.</p>	<p>Use these verbs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• show how one author questions another author or challenges commonly held views.</li></ul>
<p><b>Claim, Allege</b></p> <p>Giorgio (2012) <b>claims</b> that current students are less motivated than previous generations; however, there are number of studies that contradict this assertion. For example...</p>	<p>Use these verbs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• make a simple statement of fact, which you tend not to agree with.</li><li>• contrast with other sources that you may agree with, using transitional phrases, such as: <i>however, although, on the other hand.</i></li></ul>
<p><b>Define</b></p> <p>Mullaly (1967:13) <b>defines</b> ethics as “moral correctness”.</p>	<p>Use this verb to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• provide a precise definition.</li><li>• use another author’s definition to frame your own argument or to evaluate the basis of theirs.</li></ul>



<p><b>Describe, Outline</b></p> <p>Papadopoulos (2018:8) <b>describes</b> how the meetings of the group are conducted.</p>	<p>Use these verbs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• describe a thing or a process, or outline a theory or framework.</li><li>• draw on the source author's description as the basis for making further comment on a situation.</li></ul>
<p><b>Demonstrate, Show, Establish</b></p> <p>Tran (2012) <b>demonstrates</b> that investment in tertiary education has a strong beneficial effect on the country's potential for economic growth.</p>	<p>Use these verbs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• persuade readers that something has been proven through evidence and logic AND that you agree with the author's point or find it convincing.</li></ul>
<p><b>Highlight</b></p> <p>In a discussion of the types of users of accounting information, Fauve (1997) <b>highlights</b> the needs of the investor.</p>	<p>Use this verb to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• emphasise a point made by an author. (You would then add your own analysis and state whether you think that this thing is of particular importance, or not).</li></ul>
<p><b>Identify</b></p> <p>Three major types of users of accounting information have been <b>identified</b> (Fauve 1997)</p>	<p>Use this verb to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• name and describe something, e.g. elements of a theory or framework.</li><li>• introduce something that has been expertly identified in your source, that you will then go on to analyse.</li></ul>
<p><b>List</b></p> <p>Nguyen and Best <b>list</b> five possible approaches to this problem.<sup>14</sup></p>	<p>Use this verb to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• outline a list of points/approaches that will be useful in supporting your main idea.</li><li>• signal that you will be using the same approach as the source author to analyse an issue.</li></ul>



### Maintain

Limowski (2017) **maintains** that university entry should be restricted to students with ATARs of 80 or above, because many students have difficulty in their first year

Use this verb to:

- convey that the source author persists in a belief, but you have some reservations about the author's claims – and you might follow this up with counter-evidence.

### Refute

Opetai (1998) **refutes** the commonly accepted notion that Aboriginal people accepted colonisation without struggle by listing hundreds of examples of resistance which occurred over a fifty year period in New South Wales.

Use this verb to:

- show that you agree with an author who has rejected a theory or claim that they believe is incorrect.

### State

Jacobowicz (1997) **states** that Netti was the leader of the group from 1981 to 1986.

Use this verb to:

- show that the source author has made a simple statement of fact, which you *may* or *may not* agree with.
- introduce an idea which you are then going to analyse and come to a conclusion about.

### Suggest

Stephenson (2010) **has suggested** that one reason for the increase in cases of tuberculosis may have been the growth in movement between countries.

Use this verb to:

- put forward an idea for consideration but perhaps you do not want to argue for very strongly and *you do not want to say whether you fully agree or not*.