Verbs for Referring to Sources

You can indicate your attitude to the sources you cite by choosing specific verbs to refer to them. Don't just keep repeating “Smith says.” There is a wide choice of such verbs in English. Use a dictionary to check that you have chosen a verb with the nuance you intend.

Here are some grammatical patterns to follow in using these verbs:

**Pattern 1:** reporting verb + that + subject + verb

- acknowledge
- admit
- agree
- allege
- argue
- assert
- assume
- believe
- claim
- conclude
- consider
- decide
- demonstrate
- deny
- determine
- discover
- doubt
- emphasize
- explain
- find
- hypothesize
- imply
- indicate
- infer
- note
- object
- observe
- point out
- prove
- reveal
- say
- show
- state
- suggest
- think

(a) Da Souza argues that previous researchers have misinterpreted the data.
(b) Researchers have demonstrated that the procedure is harmful.
(c) Positivists find that social disorders are exacerbated by class factors.
(d) Singh infers that both states are essential.

Note that these verbs all differ in meaning—they cannot be used interchangeably. For example, the verb argue in sample sentence (a) indicates your judgement that the author’s conclusion is based on evidence and reasoning, but that other conclusions might be possible. The verb demonstrate in sentence (b) indicates your judgement that the researchers’ evidence and reasoning are so convincing that no other conclusion is possible.

Beware of using the verbs discuss or express followed by that. For example, it is incorrect to write, “The reviewer expressed that the movie is not worth seeing.” You can, however, write the following: “The reviewer expressed the view that the movie is not worth seeing.”

**N.B.:** Verbs in this category may also appear in a subordinate clause beginning with As:

- (e) As Da Souza argues, misinterpretations by previous researchers need to be corrected.
- (f) As researchers have demonstrated, the procedure is harmful.

**Pattern 2:** reporting verb + somebody/something + for + noun/gerund

- applaud
- blame
- censure
- criticize
- disparage
- fault
- praise
- ridicule
- single out
- thank

(a) Smith criticized Jones for his use of incomplete data (OR for using incomplete data).
(b) Both Smith and Jones condemn previous researchers for distorting the data.
(c) Banting thanked Best for his contribution to the discovery of insulin.

**Pattern 3:** reporting verb + somebody/something + as + noun/gerund/adjective

- appraise
- assess
- characterize
- class
- classify
- define
- depict
- describe
- evaluate
- identify
- interpret
- portray
- present
- refer
- view

(a) Jones describes the findings as resting on irrefutable evidence.
(b) Smith identifies the open window as a source of contamination.
(c) Smith and Jones both present their data as conclusive.

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