

chicago manual reporting verbs

The Chicago Manual of Style's guidance on reporting verbs is essential for academic and professional writing, offering clarity and precision in attributing statements and ideas. Understanding these verbs is crucial for accurately conveying source material and maintaining scholarly integrity. This comprehensive guide delves into the nuances of Chicago manual reporting verbs, exploring their proper usage, common pitfalls, and their role in academic discourse. We will examine a wide array of reporting verbs, categorize them by their connotations, and provide practical examples to illustrate their effective application in research papers, theses, and other scholarly works. Mastering these tools will elevate your writing by ensuring precise attribution and sophisticated argumentation.

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Understanding the Function of Reporting Verbs

Reporting verbs are the cornerstones of academic attribution, serving as the bridge between your own words and the ideas, findings, or statements of others. They are verbs used to introduce quoted or paraphrased material, indicating how information was conveyed by a source. In the context of The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), the choice of reporting verb is not merely a stylistic flourish; it carries significant weight in shaping the reader's perception of the source's contribution and the author's interpretation. A well-chosen reporting verb signals the relationship between the original statement and the way it is presented in the current text, whether it is a direct quotation, a summary, an argument, or a piece of evidence.

The primary function of these verbs is to clearly and concisely attribute information to its original source. This is fundamental to academic honesty, preventing plagiarism and giving credit where it is due. Beyond simple attribution, reporting verbs also convey the author's stance towards the information being presented. Some verbs suggest agreement or support, while others imply skepticism, disagreement, or simply the act of stating a fact. The Chicago Manual emphasizes that the precision of the reporting verb can enhance the credibility of the entire work by demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the source material and its context.

Commonly Used Reporting Verbs in Academic Writing

Academic writing relies on a robust vocabulary of reporting verbs to facilitate clear and accurate communication. While many verbs can technically introduce a citation, certain ones are more frequently employed due to their neutrality, specificity, or established convention within scholarly

discourse. These verbs help authors to introduce evidence, arguments, and statements from various sources, including scholarly articles, books, interviews, and archival documents.

Some of the most frequently encountered reporting verbs in academic contexts include:

- States
- Argues
- Claims
- Suggests
- Asserts
- Maintains
- Contends
- Explains
- Describes
- Notes
- Observes
- Reports
- Reveals
- Posits
- Demonstrates

The choice among these verbs depends heavily on the nature of the information being introduced and the author's interpretation. For instance, "argues" and "contends" are typically used when a source presents a reasoned case, while "states" or "notes" are more neutral for factual reporting. "Claims" can sometimes carry a neutral or even slightly skeptical connotation, depending on the surrounding text.

Categorizing Reporting Verbs by Nuance

To effectively employ reporting verbs, it is beneficial to understand the subtle differences in their connotations. The Chicago Manual of Style, while not providing an exhaustive list, encourages writers to select verbs that accurately reflect the action or intent of the original source. This allows for a more sophisticated and precise presentation of information.

Verbs Indicating Simple Statement or Presentation of Fact

These verbs are generally neutral and are used when a source is presenting information without necessarily developing a strong argument or expressing a particular stance. They are suitable for introducing factual claims, observations, or straightforward descriptions.

- States
- Notes
- Reports
- Describes
- Mentions
- Observes

Verbs Indicating Argumentation or Persuasion

When a source is presenting a case, attempting to persuade the reader, or defending a particular viewpoint, these verbs are appropriate. They highlight the persuasive or analytical nature of the source's contribution.

- Argues
- Contends
- Asserts
- Maintains
- Claims
- Posits
- Advocates

Verbs Indicating Interpretation or Revelation

These verbs are used when a source is offering an interpretation of data, an explanation of a phenomenon, or revealing a new understanding. They suggest a process of analysis or discovery.

- Explains

- Suggests
- Demonstrates
- Reveals
- Illustrates
- Implies

Verbs Indicating Disagreement or Skepticism

While less common for neutral reporting, some verbs can subtly indicate disagreement or a critical stance, though this is often better handled through explicit commentary rather than solely relying on the reporting verb.

- Challenges
- Questions
- Refutes
- Disputes

It is important to use these verbs judiciously and ensure that the surrounding text supports any implied skepticism. Overreliance on verbs that suggest disagreement can skew the presentation of a source's views.

Avoiding Misuse and Ambiguity

The power of reporting verbs lies in their specificity. Misusing them can lead to misrepresentation of the source material, creating ambiguity and undermining the author's credibility. A common pitfall is using overly strong verbs for simple statements or, conversely, using weak verbs for significant arguments.

For example, describing a complex academic argument as something the author "notes" would be a disservice to the original work. Similarly, presenting a simple factual observation as something the author "argues" could mischaracterize the source's contribution and imply a level of debate or persuasion that does not exist. The Chicago Manual advises writers to err on the side of clarity and accuracy, choosing verbs that precisely match the tone and intent of the original statement.

Another area of potential misuse involves the indiscriminate use of "claim" or "assert." While these verbs can be perfectly appropriate, they can sometimes carry a faint undertone of doubt or a suggestion that the statement might be unsubstantiated, especially if used repeatedly without strong supporting evidence. It is crucial to consider the context and the overall narrative flow when selecting

such verbs. If a source presents a well-supported and widely accepted fact, a more neutral verb like "states" or "demonstrates" would be more fitting.

The Role of Reporting Verbs in Maintaining Objectivity

Maintaining objectivity is paramount in academic writing, and reporting verbs play a significant role in achieving this goal. By carefully selecting neutral and precise verbs, authors can present information from sources without injecting their own biases or interpretations prematurely. This allows the reader to engage with the source material directly and form their own conclusions, supported by the evidence presented.

The Chicago Manual of Style emphasizes that the author's voice should be distinct from the voices of the sources being cited. Reporting verbs act as clear indicators of which voice is speaking. When an author uses verbs like "states," "reports," or "describes," they are signaling to the reader that they are presenting the source's words or ideas as they are, without significant authorial commentary or interpretation. This is crucial for presenting a balanced and fair account of the existing scholarship.

Conversely, using verbs that introduce interpretation or analysis, such as "explains," "suggests," or "demonstrates," should be reserved for instances where the author is actively engaging with and interpreting the source material. Even in these cases, the reporting verb should accurately reflect the nature of the author's engagement, ensuring that the interpretation is clearly attributed to the author of the current text, not presented as an inherent quality of the source itself.

Advanced Usage and Stylistic Considerations

Beyond basic attribution, reporting verbs can be employed to add sophistication and nuance to academic prose. Skilled writers use them not just to introduce information but to guide the reader's understanding of that information and its relationship to the ongoing argument. This involves a conscious selection of verbs that can signal a progression of ideas, highlight the significance of a particular piece of evidence, or introduce a counterargument.

For instance, a writer might use "furthermore" followed by a reporting verb like "explains" to indicate that a new piece of information builds upon a previous point. Alternatively, a contrasting idea might be introduced with a reporting verb like "however" followed by "contends" or "challenges" to signal a shift in perspective. The judicious use of adverbs in conjunction with reporting verbs can further refine the meaning. For example, "consequently, [author] argues" signals a cause-and-effect relationship.

The Chicago Manual of Style also implicitly encourages variety in reporting verbs. While it is important to maintain clarity and avoid ambiguity, overusing a single verb (like "says" or "states") can make prose monotonous. Therefore, authors are encouraged to build a diverse repertoire of reporting verbs and to select them based on a careful consideration of their specific meaning and the context in which they are used. This not only enhances readability but also demonstrates a command of language and a deep understanding of scholarly communication conventions.

Conclusion: Mastering Attribution with Reporting Verbs

The accurate and nuanced use of reporting verbs is a hallmark of effective academic writing, as underscored by the principles of The Chicago Manual of Style. These verbs are far more than mere connectors; they are tools that shape meaning, convey authorial intent, and uphold the integrity of scholarly discourse. By understanding the distinct connotations of various reporting verbs, from the neutral "reports" to the analytical "explains" and the argumentative "contends," writers can precisely attribute ideas, present evidence effectively, and guide their readers through complex arguments.

The careful selection of reporting verbs ensures clarity, avoids misinterpretation, and contributes to the overall objectivity and credibility of a research paper or scholarly work. As you refine your writing, pay close attention to how you introduce and contextualize the work of others. A robust understanding and skillful application of Chicago manual reporting verbs will undoubtedly elevate the precision and impact of your own contributions to academic conversation.

Q: What is the primary purpose of reporting verbs in academic writing according to the Chicago Manual of Style?

A: The primary purpose of reporting verbs is to clearly and accurately attribute information, statements, and ideas to their original sources. They act as a bridge between the author's text and the source material, indicating how the information was presented by the original author.

Q: Are there specific verbs recommended by the Chicago Manual of Style for all types of reporting?

A: The Chicago Manual of Style does not mandate a fixed list of verbs but rather emphasizes the importance of choosing verbs that precisely convey the nuance of the original statement and the author's relationship to it. Precision and clarity are the guiding principles.

Q: What is the difference between "argues" and "states" when used as reporting verbs?

A: "States" is generally a neutral verb used to introduce factual information or a direct assertion. "Argues," on the other hand, implies a more reasoned presentation of a case, a claim supported by evidence, or an attempt to persuade the reader.

Q: Can reporting verbs be used to show disagreement with a source?

A: Yes, certain reporting verbs, such as "challenges," "refutes," or "disputes," can be used to indicate disagreement. However, the Chicago Manual of Style suggests that such intentions are often best conveyed through explicit commentary alongside the reporting verb to avoid ambiguity.

Q: How can I ensure I am not misusing reporting verbs and causing ambiguity?

A: To avoid misuse, carefully consider the original context and intent of the source material. Choose a reporting verb that accurately reflects whether the source is presenting a fact, developing an argument, offering an interpretation, or making a simple observation. Avoid overly strong verbs for simple statements and weak verbs for significant arguments.

Q: Is it acceptable to use the verb "says" as a reporting verb in academic writing?

A: While "says" is a common reporting verb in everyday language, academic writing often benefits from more precise and varied verbs. The Chicago Manual of Style, and academic conventions in general, encourage the use of verbs like "states," "argues," "explains," or "contends" for greater clarity and sophistication.

Q: How do reporting verbs contribute to the objectivity of a text?

A: Reporting verbs help maintain objectivity by clearly signaling which ideas belong to the author of the text and which belong to the cited source. Neutral verbs like "notes" or "reports" present information as it was conveyed by the source, without immediate authorial interpretation, thus allowing the reader to engage with the source material more directly.

Q: Should I always use a reporting verb when introducing a quotation or paraphrase?

A: Yes, according to academic writing standards and the principles of attribution, it is generally necessary to use a reporting verb (or a clear introductory phrase that functions similarly) to attribute quoted or paraphrased material to its source. This ensures that the reader knows who is speaking or presenting the information.

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