

USING REPORTING VERBS 2

When you are referring to the ideas of other people, you will need to use a range of different reporting verbs. The following three tables contain some of the most frequently used reporting verbs. It is important to remember that these verbs may be followed by different structures (see Tables 1 and 2) and they may have different strength – used for neutral statements or to report opinions (see Table 3).

○ **Table 1: Neutral reporting verbs usually followed by ‘that’**

acknowledge	conclude	comment	confirm	demonstrate	establish
explain	find	hold	indicate	mention	note
observe	order	point out	propose	report	require
Rule	say	show	state	suggest	

Example:

The judge **stated that** it had been an unusual case.

○ **Table 2: Neutral reporting verbs usually followed by a ‘noun phrase’**

address	analyse	define	describe	discuss
establish	examine	explore	focus on	identify
investigate	list	mention	order	present
question	refuse	review	study	survey

Example:

The judge **refused** to consider the case.

The lawyers **discussed** the options available to them.

○ **Table 3: Opinion (evaluative) reporting verbs – these verbs refer to a writer’s position or opinion. The structure varies * followed by *that***

*advocate	*agree	*allege	allude to	*argue
*assert	*assume	*believe	challenge	*claim
*concede	*contend	criticise	emphasise	highlight
*imply	*insist	*maintain	refute	*suppose

Example:

The barrister **alluded** to clause 2 of the contract.

He **argued that** it was no longer valid.

Other reporting expressions that you could use:

According to the witness, the car had not been used.

In the view of the judge, the evidence was not strong enough.

Use of VERB TENSES for reporting information

Students often think that all opinions should be reported in the **past** tense because the books and journals that they are reading have been written in the past.

Read the following extract from Lord Denning's book. Although the book was written in 1979, we would ask the question: "What is he saying?" not "What did he say?"

In almost every case in which you have to advise you will have to interpret a statute. There are stacks and stacks of them. Far worse for you than for me.

Denning, (1979) *The Discipline of Law* London: Butterworth p9

You can report this in the following way:

Lord Denning says that it has become more difficult for lawyers to advise a client on a case because there are more cases and laws to consider.

In other words, you do not always have to use the **past tense** for reporting the ideas / information just because it was written in the **past**. In this example, the information is still relevant so the verb tense that you use is the Present tense as it relates to the current relevance of the ideas.

1 Use the PRESENT TENSE when you are reporting information / opinions that are still current. This signals to the reader that this view is still recognised as valid or relevant to the current thinking on the subject.

examples

As Karliner notes in the context of multi-national firms, '[t]he role that organised communities, environmental groups and others have played in compelling the transnationals to change their behaviour is an achievement that most corporate environmentalists fail to recognise'.¹

Kauper and Snyder divide private litigation cases into two categories: follow-on actions and independently initiated cases.

¹ J. Karliner, *The Corporate Planet: Ecology and Politics in the Age of Globalisation* (1997) 3

2 Use the PRESENT PERFECT to make:

a) general reference to previous research or opinion without dates or author:

example

It has been generally accepted that legal sanctions play a major role in preventing and deterring criminal behaviour.

b) reference to author(s) and still relevant now. At the same time, it can *sometimes* signal that the information given is not widely accepted.

examples

Snyder and Kauper have shown that competitors account for a substantial proportion of claims filed.

The Chairman of the OFT has emphasized that the Office is prepared to intervene where “policy issues are involved”.

3) Use the PAST SIMPLE when you want to emphasize that the ideas relate to the past and are no longer valid / relevant.

a) Tell the reader that the argument was considered valid or relevant at a previous point in time. Unless you provide arguments to the contrary, the reader will assume that this is no longer the case.

example

Harris suggested that the shareholders did not have the right to request information about the incident.

b) If you mention the year or a past time, you need to use Past Simple.

examples

Writing in 1979, Lord Denning said that it had become more difficult for lawyers to make a decision because there were more cases and laws to consider.

In the 1854 case, Baron Alderson stated that damages were only recoverable if two conditions were met.