

Verbs in Academic Writing

In the same way that a story needs active, dynamic verbs to keep the plot moving, academic essays too will benefit from the correct use of verbs to help you present your ideas. The table below lists useful verbs that are very common in academic texts. You are likely to come across more verbs for the different categories in your reading. Add to each list as you notice how published authors use them in your textbooks and journal articles. Being familiar with these words will help you use them effectively in your writing.

Important: Note that the words in each list are not mere synonyms of one another. There are shades of differences in their meaning, and you must make sure that you select the appropriate one for your own context. If you are not sure of how to use a particular word, refer to the Word Bank section of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English software which is available on in the TLS-Writing Centre Lab (or available for purchase at the UTSC Book Store).

Showing Change or Difference	<i>Increase:</i> broaden enlarge exceed expand generate improve maximize optimize
	<i>Decrease:</i> decline deteriorate erode minimize narrow reduce worsen
	<i>Difference or Varying:</i> alter contrast convert deviate differ differentiate distinguish diverge evolve modify revise transform
Shows stability	maintain sustain
Shows keeping within a certain range/ keeping under a certain level	confine inhibit prohibit restrict

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Shows in-depth study	<i>analyze examine investigate observe survey</i>
Stating, Restating or Emphasizing Ideas/Concepts	Stating: <i>acknowledge argue attribute comment propose establish identify mention note observe state</i>
	Restating: <i>elaborate expand</i>
	Emphasizing: <i>emphasize stress</i>
Describes phenomenon or data	Describes phenomena: <i>acquire define impact signify symbolize</i>
	Describes data: <i>approximate demonstrate indicate levels off reflect</i>
Stating position	Positive <i>advocate hold the view that hypothesize propose</i>
	Negative/Contradict: <i>deny dispute negate reject</i>
Showing uncertainty or an extrapolation of information	Uncertainty: <i>predict speculate</i>
	Extrapolation of information: <i>deduce imply infer project</i>
Shows components	<i>comprise consist constitute incorporate</i>

References:

Nation, I. S. P. (1990). *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. New York: Newbury House.
Academic Word List. <http://www-ub.massey.ac.nz/~wwlang/staff/awl/headwords.shtml>

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