UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

# Active Verbs for Discussing Ideas

Active verbs are important components of any academic writing! Just as in other forms of writing, they work as engines, driving the action of your sentences in many potentially vivid, clear, and colorful ways. Instead of opting for bland, unspecific expressions (“says,” “writes about,” “believes,” “states”) consider using more vivid or nuanced verbs such as “argues,” “insists,” “explains,” “emphasizes,” “challenges,” “agrees,” etc. The list below offers dozens of such verbs that will help you communicate your ideas and the ideas of others more clearly, expressively, and powerfully.

accepts

acknowledges

adds

admires

affirms

allows that

analyzes

announces

answers

argues

assaults

assembles

asserts

assists

buttresses

categorizes

cautions

challenges

claims

clarifies

compares

complicates

concludes

condemns

confirms

conflates

confronts

confuses

considers

contradicts

contrasts

convinces

criticizes

critiques

declares

defends

defies

demands

denies

describes

determines

diminishes

disagrees

discusses

disputes

disregards

distinguishes

emphasizes

endorses

enumerates

exaggerates

experiences

experiments

explains

exposes

facilitates

formulates

grants

guides

handles

hesitates

highlights

hints

hypothesizes

identifies

illuminates

implies

infers

informs

initiates

insinuates

insists

interprets

intimates

judges

lists

maintains

marshals

narrates

negates

observes

outlines

parses

perceives

persists

persuades

pleads

points out

postulates

praises

proposes

protects

provides

qualifies

ratifies

rationalizes

reads

reconciles

reconsiders

refutes

regards

rejects

relinquishes

reminds

repudiates

resolves

responds

retorts

reveals

reviews

seeks

sees

shares

shifts

shows

simplifies

states *(but don’t overuse)*

stresses

substitutes

suggests

summarizes

supplements

supplies

supports

synthesizes

tests

toys with

treats

uncovers

undermines

urges

verifies

warns

## Words to Avoid

* **“mentions,”** unless you mean “refer to something briefly and without going into detail.”\*
* **“notion”** as a synonym for “idea” implies “impulsive,” “whimsical,” not well considered.\*

\*New Oxford American Dictionary

Credit: Adapted from a list by Cinthia Gannett by Doug Kirshen and Robert B. Cochran, Brandeis University Writing Program, 2020.

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