



English Grammar

A Student's Guide to Using 'Tense' in Academic Writing





Disclaimer

Please note that the authors' names used in example sentences are for illustrative purposes only. The information in examples is not based on real academic evidence.



Common Tenses



The following tenses are perhaps the most commonly used in academic writing:

- **Simple Past:** *found, argued, claimed*
- **Simple Present:** *argues, concludes*
- **Present Perfect:** *has become, have shown*
- **Present Continuous:** *is becoming*



Common Tenses



Examples

- **Simple Past:** Smith (2005) *showed* that teenagers *spent* an excessive amount of time surfing the Internet.
- **Simple Present:** Jones (2011) *concludes* that internet addiction *is* prevalent among teenagers.
- **Present Perfect:** Internet addiction *has been found* to be prevalent among teenagers (e.g. Smith, 2005).
- **Present Continuous:** Internet addiction *is becoming* more and more prevalent among teenagers (e.g. Jones, 2011).



Present Simple



The Present Simple can be used in general claims

Statements (1)

- Personal Computers *are* ubiquitous in western society (Smith, 2009; Jones, 2010, Baxter, 2011).
- Social networking *is* a familiar feature of modern life (Smith, 2009; Jones, 2010; Baxter, 2011).
- The Internet *is* arguably the most important invention of modern times (e.g. Baxter, 2011).



Present Perfect



The Present Perfect can also be used in general claims to emphasise 'recency' (i.e. close to present time)

Statements (2)

- Social networking *has become* a familiar feature of modern life (Smith, 2005; Jones, 2010; Baxter, 2011).
- Use of the Internet *has become* increasingly widespread in recent times (Jones, 2010; Baxter, 2011).



Present Continuous



The Present Continuous can also be used in general claims to emphasise change

Statements (3)

- Ownership of Personal Computers *is increasing* in western society (Smith, 2005; Jones, 2010; Baxter, 2011).
- Social networking *is becoming* an all too familiar feature of modern life (Smith, 2005; Jones, 2010; Baxter, 2011).
- Use of the Internet *is becoming* more and more widespread (Smith, 2005; Jones, 2010; Baxter, 2011).



Reporting Verbs



In academic writing, 'reporting verbs' are often used to refer to information from reading sources (=texts)

Examples

- **Statements:** *to claim, to state, to assert*
- **Results:** *to find, to show, to demonstrate, to report*
- **Conclusions:** *to conclude, to suggest, to indicate*
- **Arguments:** *to argue, to contest, to criticise*



Reporting Claims



The Present Simple can be used to report claims which are 'new' or 'old' but still true or valid

Statements (1)

- Smith (2011) *states* that.....
- Baxter (2010) *asserts* that.....
- Jones (2005) *claims* that.....
- McTosh (2006) *maintains* that.....



Reporting Claims



The Past Simple is preferred if the claim is 'old' or if the claim is 'no longer true or valid'

Statements (2)

- Smith (2011) ***stated*** that.....
- Baxter (2011) ***asserted*** that.....
- Jones (2005) ***claimed*** that.....
- McTosh (2005) ***pointed out*** that.....



Reporting Results



The Past Simple is often used to report results

Examples

- Smith (2005) *found* that.....
- As Smith (2005) *showed*,
- Smith's (2005) study *demonstrated* ...
- In a study of internet use, Smith (2005) *reported*...



Reporting Results



Exception 1: The Present Simple can be used if the results are very recent

Examples

- As Jones (2011) *shows*....
- Jones' (2011) study *demonstrates* ...
- Jones (2011) *reports*...

Note: The verb 'finds' is not usually used in this situation



Tables and Figures



Exception 2: The Present Simple is often used to introduce a table or figure in a 'report' document

Examples

- The table *shows*...
- Figure 1 *represents*.....
- The diagram below *illustrates*.....



Conclusions



The Past Simple and Present Simple can be used to contrast results (Past) with conclusions (Present)

Conclusions

- Smith's (2005) study *showed* that employee's in those companies surveyed *spent* 2 to 3 hours per day surfing the Internet. Similarly, Jones (2007), *found* that productivity *dropped* as a result of surfing the Internet at work. These findings *suggest* that internet abuse *is* closely associated with lost productivity.



References



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Thank you for watching!



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