



Verbs of Attribution: Going Beyond “So-and-so says...”

Verbs of attribution, also known as lead-in verbs, signal that the writer is quoting, paraphrasing, or referring to another source. “Says” is the most common—and boring if overused—verb of attribution. The following verbs indicate you are citing someone else’s opinions, or information you found elsewhere. Often these verbs show whether or not the writer or the source author agrees with the cited material. While some verbs of attribution are relatively objective, others carry more emotional weight and should be used with care.

More objective: illustrates, indicates, mentions, addresses, states, suggests, cites, writes...

Use with care: exclaims, insinuates, retorts, mumbles, whines...

General list of attributive verbs:

accepts	assumes	contends	explains	notes	reveals
accounts for	believes	contents	expresses	objects	sees
acknowledges	categorizes	criticizes	finds	observes	shows
addresses	challenges	deals with	grants	offers	speculates
adds	charges	decides	hypothesizes	opposes	states
admits	cites	declares	illustrates	points out	suggests
advises	claims	defines	implies	proposes	supports
affirms	comments	denies	indicates	questions	supposes
agrees	compares	describes	insinuates	realizes	thinks
alleges	complains	disagrees	insists	reasons	uses
allows	concedes	discusses	interprets	refutes	utilizes
analyzes	concludes	disputes	introduces	rejects	verifies
answers	concur	emphasizes	lists	remarks	whines
argues	confesses	emphasizes	maintains	replies	writes
asks	confirms	endorses	mentions	reports	
asserts	considers	exclaims	mumbles	responds	

Be attentive to each verb’s implied meanings. Be careful not to mislead the reader with inappropriate verbs of attribution. For example, here is a quotation from bell hooks (Gloria Watkins publishes as bell hooks, and she purposefully does not capitalize her name):

Feminism is essentially a white, middle-class endeavor.
-bell hooks, Yearning

Notice how different verbs of attribution are or are not appropriate:

- ***admits*** = indicates resistant acceptance; will likely be qualified with a rebuttal.

bell hooks admits that “feminism is essentially a white, middle-class endeavor.”

- ***asserts*** = the writer is presenting the statement as bell hooks’ opinion rather than a fact.

bell hooks asserts that “feminism is essentially a white, middle-class endeavor.”

- ***insinuates*** = indicates that the source author is indirectly suggesting a negative evaluation.

bell hooks insinuates that “feminism is essentially a white, middle-class endeavor.”

- ***believes*** = the quotation is a belief, not a statement of fact. The writer has the opportunity to agree or disagree in the following sentences.

bell hooks believes that “feminism is essentially a white, middle-class endeavor.”

- ***verifies*** = the writer is using the source author’s statement to support his own claim, and thereby implying that the source author is an authoritative source. Be sure to use verifiable facts rather than opinions with this verb. Notice that this verb does not appropriately introduce bell hooks’ opinion.

bell hooks verifies that “feminism is essentially a white, middle-class endeavor.”

- ***confesses*** = the writer is implying that the source author accepts responsibility or admits guilt.

bell hooks confesses that “feminism is essentially a white, middle-class endeavor.”

If in doubt, use a dictionary to check the implied meanings of any attributive verb you use. Be aware of that some verbs require special sentence structure; not all verbs are directly interchangeable with “says.” For example, the verb “accounts for” must be followed by a noun. Also remember that verbs of attribution are used to not only directly quote a source, but also paraphrase:

bell hooks accounts for class and race within a feminist paradigm.

For more information about blending quotes into your text, see the “Using and Framing Direct Quotations” handout. For more information about paraphrasing, see the “Paraphrasing” handout.