

The Absolute Dos

Every discipline has its signature moves. Here are ours — steal them freely.

The mindset: you're building an argument, not having a chat

Scientific writing isn't conversation written down — it's an argument assembled in public, where every claim shows its evidence. That shift starts with your verbs. Authors in your paper don't "say" or "believe" things; they *argue*, *demonstrate*, *contend*. Results don't "talk about" anything; they *reveal*, *support*, *contradict*. Get the verbs right and the whole paper stands up straighter.

And here's the liberating part: expert writers all use the same stock of moves and phrases to organize their arguments. Using them isn't plagiarism — it's learning the grammar of the genre, the same way musicians learn scales (Graff & Birkenstein, 2021). The templates below are yours.

Do 1 · Choose verbs that argue

When you're...

Reach for

Presenting a claim

Smith (1994) *argues, asserts, claims, contends, emphasizes, suggests, concludes*

Reporting a finding The results *revealed, showed, indicated, demonstrated, suggested*

Noting agreement These results *corroborate, confirm, support, verify, substantiate, are consistent with*

Noting conflict The findings *refute, contradict, call into question, are contrary to*

Banned from your verb bank: *states, says, believes, talks about, feels*. Those are for interviews, not arguments.

Do 2 • Use the standard moves (template phrases)

Each situation in a paper has phrases that professionals reach for. Borrow the skeleton; the content is yours.

Opening the story

Introducing the standard view: *Conventional wisdom has it that... • Historically, it has been assumed that...*

Introducing a controversy: *Twenty years ago, the notion that ___ seemed preposterous; within the past few years, however, several researchers have shown that...*

Working with theories

Describing: *Taylor (1999), in her ___ theory, argued that...*
· *According to Smith (2010), people...*

Challenging: *A major weakness of this idea is that... ·*
Although it is true that X, it does not necessarily follow
that Y... · These findings are at odds with those of Hu
(1994)...

Handling mixed evidence: *The evidence supporting Hu's*
(2001) theory is mixed. On the one hand... on the other
hand...

Finding and naming the gap

At present, research has yet to establish whether... ·
Relatively little empirical research has been devoted to... ·
The scant research to date suggests that...

These phrases are the hinge of your entire literature review — they're how the funnel turns toward *your* study.

Synthesizing (the B&L-approved moves)

Together, such studies suggest... · A growing body of
research suggests... · In short, the bulk of the evidence
supports...

Notice what these do: they force you to talk about studies *collectively* — exactly what separates a synthesis from a list.

Staking your claim

The thesis: *The premise of this paper is that... · To our knowledge, there is no empirical data to suggest... · The purpose of the current study was to examine...*

Signaling an idea is yours: *It seems plausible that... · Thus, it can be surmised that... · One interpretation of these findings is that...*

Backing it with evidence: *Consistent with this notion, recent research confirms that... · Indeed, research confirms that...*

Closing the story

Limitations: *Although there is compelling evidence that X, some limitations must be acknowledged... · Until the issue of X is resolved, caution is advised in interpreting these results.*

Future research: *An important avenue for future research is to identify...*

Practical implications: *These findings have significant applications in...; for example...*

The closing paragraph: *In short, the emerging body of evidence suggests X, and in doing so has enhanced our understanding of the relationship between A and B.*

Do 3 · Start sentences with signposts

Transitions tell the reader what *kind* of sentence is coming — without them, prose sounds choppy and readers get lost between ideas.

To...	Open with
Clarify	<i>That is; In other words; In effect; In short</i>
Give an example	<i>Specifically; For example; Indeed; In fact</i>
Concede a point	<i>Admittedly; Of course; To be sure</i>
Emphasize	<i>Interestingly; Surprisingly; Importantly</i>
Show cause	<i>As a result; Consequently; Therefore; Thus</i>
Contrast	<i>By contrast; However; Whereas; Nonetheless</i>
Add a parallel	<i>Similarly; In a similar vein; Moreover; Furthermore</i>
Wrap up	<i>In sum; In essence; Overall; In conclusion</i>
Connect to predictions	<i>Consistent with predictions; Contrary to predictions; As predicted</i>

Do 4 · Outline before you write. Always.

Organization doesn't happen while you type — it's created beforehand, by you, on purpose. For your literature review: sort your articles by the *argument you're making*, never by publication year. Chronological order is what a pile looks like; thematic order is what an argument looks like. Your Week 4

synthesis matrix already did the sorting — your outline is that matrix stood upright: themes become sections, the gap becomes the turn, your hypothesis becomes the destination.

Try it

Flabby: *"Smith (2020) talks about how social media is bad for teens and Jones (2021) also says stuff about this."* Rewrite it with argument verbs and a synthesis move, then compare.

One strong version

"Emerging research links adolescent social media use to poorer well-being. Smith (2020) demonstrated that heavier use predicted increased anxiety over one school year, and Jones (2021) reported converging results in a larger national sample. Together, such studies suggest the association is robust across methods — though its direction remains contested."

Same two citations. Now it argues, synthesizes, and even opens a gap.

Adapted with gratitude from course materials by Dr. Traci Giuliano (Southwestern University). Pair with [The Absolute Nos](#) — the habits to break while you're building these.

References

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