

Integrating Sources & Indicating Stance

The language you choose to introduce your sources is extremely important, because it lets readers know what you think about those sources—in other words, it conveys a great deal about your “stance” (see Gordon Harvey’s “Elements of the Academic Essay”) as a writer. Well-chosen verbs (other than “says,” or “writes,” or “states”) can make your writing feel more confident and show that you are comfortable writing in *conversation* with sources.

Note how the following verbs imply very different meanings about the sources they might introduce. Then, read the four examples below and think about the language in them which indicates stance.

Finally, on your own time, read through a piece of your own writing and circle every verb you use to introduce sources. Do you notice any patterns? How might you vary your choice of verbs, to be more precise? How might they way you introduce your sources help you think about deepening your analysis of them?

Verbs commonly used to introduce sources:

acknowledges	comments	endorses	rails
adds	compares	grants	reasons
admits	confirms	illustrates	refutes
agrees	contends	implies	rejects
argues	declares	insists	reports
asserts	denies	notes	responds
believes	disputes	observes	suggests
boasts	de-emphasizes	offers	thinks
claims	emphasizes	points out	writes

What do the following introductions imply about the stance of the writer in relation to his or her material?

In his grandly titled *How Fiction Works*, Columbia literature professor and *New Yorker* critic James Wood claims, somewhat counterintuitively, that “first-person narration is generally more reliable than unreliable; and third-person ‘omniscient’ narration is generally more partial than omniscient” (5).

In her essay “Mind Plus: Sociocognitive Pleasures of Jane Austen,” literary critic Lisa Zunshine makes an audacious claim: “As a system of evolved cognitive structures, theory of mind thus enables fictional narratives. As I have argued in *Why We Read Fiction, Theory of Mind and the Novel*, it makes literature, as we know it, possible” (110).

“I have taken pains to obtain and compare abundant evidence on this subject,” boasts Victorian physiologist Thomas Laycock, “and the result of my inquiries I may briefly epitomize as follows:--I should say that the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind” (Shuttleworth and Bourne-Taylor 176).

Even an ardent admirer Austen’s use of the technique admits that “it is not possible to know if Austen was consciously aware of free indirect discourse as a stylistic device” (6).