Reporting Verbs Lesson Plan

General Information	
Lesson Title	Reporting Verbs
Class/Student Information	1. upper-level undergraduates in an ecology or physiology course OR 2. multi-major undergraduates in an introductory or advanced technical writing course OR 3. multi-major graduates in a writing-intensive course
Length of Class/Activity	27 mins
Overall Instructional Goal	To teach students how to use reporting verbs in their technical and scientific writing
Lesson Objective	• Identify the primary functions of reporting verbs and how to categorize these verbs (argue, think, show, and find) • Investigate how reporting verbs are used in technical and scientific writing
How will you measure each objective?	• The in-class activities measure if students can identify the transitions that fulfill the five functions • The homework assignments measure if students can (a) identify transitions and (b) select appropriate transitions based on their intended function. • The formal writing students complete after this instruction will be measured for frequency and variety of transitions and be compared to the formal writing completed by the control students.
Justification for Lesson	Reporting verbs signal writers' confidence with the information they are presenting to their readers. These language choices therefore inform the overall credibility of writers.
Materials	You will need access to the following documents: 1. This file, which outlines the lesson 2. Presentation slides for **Orientation** and **Presentation** activities 3. In-class activities for **Engagement** activities (on green paper) 4. Homework file for **Expansion** activities (DOC file lined in Canvas) 5. Fact sheet for **Expansion** activities (URL linked in Canvas) In addition, all student computers should be running **AntConc**, which should be loaded with the **Student Writing data set**. Students will also use the **Professional Writing data set** for this unit.

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Orientation (10 min.) Before the lesson begins, ensure that students have loaded the **Student Writing data set** into AntConc. Let them know that they will also be using the **Professional Writing data set** for this lesson. As students load the TWP, **display Slide 1** from the presentation slides and distribute a paper copy of the two in-class activities (printed on green paper). Announce the lesson topic and reference the examples of reporting verbs on Slide 1. Transition into the first in-class activity (Take a Look). Read the directions outload, emphasizing that you want students to identify verbs that are used to (1) report research or (2) report what someone said. Give students about 5–7 minutes to complete this activity. The verb identification itself should not take long, but students might need help switching between corpora or setting the sorting options in AntConc. Discuss the verbs that students identified in the activity. Both data sets share similar verbs (e.g., *argue*, *found*, *show*), but students may find that the professional data set includes more of a variety of verbs choices.	Ask students to load AntConc with the Student Writing data set (or have it preloaded) before you begin the lesson. This helps ensure that students stay focused on the lesson content and not get distracted by the technology. NOTE: Students need to use both the Student Writing and Professional Writing data sets for this first activity. Remind students they will have to clear the files from the first data set (File>Clear All Tools and Files) before loading the files for the second data set (File>Open Dir). Students will be familiar with the function of *reporting verbs*, but they are likely unfamiliar with the term. Forecast that reporting verbs can often be placed into four categories that writers can use to report their technical information with optimal effectiveness. **Watch the YouTube tutorial on how to do this activity in AntConc:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79OSoQsnWNk Below are the **key takeaways** to this activity: As students analyze the concordances for the in-class activity, prompt them to scroll through all results – results are sorted alphabetically, so verbs like *say*, *show*, and *suggest* won't be noticed unless students scroll through everything. Responses for the first in-class activity will vary, but here are possible examples from the Student Writing data set: *argue* (53-61), *believe* (100-106), *conclude* (188-205), *found* (391-420), *show* (909-954), *state* (987-1002), *suggest* (1030-1049). You might also prime students that developing writers typically include more verbs classified as **think** verbs in their writing than expert writers. Examples of think verbs include *believe*, *hope*, and *feel*. While think verbs can be applied effectively, they are often joined with a personal pronoun like *I* and therefore can read more self-reflective and wondering than a stronger **argue** verbs, such

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	as *argue*, *suggest*, or *explain*. These different verbs classifications are all defined in the presentation slides and Fact Sheet, but, again, this activity can begin to prime students on the reporting function of reporting verbs. Examples from the Professional Writing data set could include *agree, argue, assume, believe, claim, demonstrate, discover, emphasize, feel, hold, indicate, infer, note, observe, say, seems, state, stress*.

Transition

"Now that you have a good understanding of when to use reporting verbs, let's discuss how you can choose these verbs based on your rhetorical purpose."

Presentation (4 min.) Transition to **Slide 2**, which should reiterate what students learned during the opening activity. Emphasize that writers use verbs to reflect their confidence level with whatever information is being reported. In the second example, what if the writer used the verb *imply* instead of *show?* How does verb choice influence the confidence level of the information being presented? Transition to **Slide 3**. There are four main classifications of reporting verbs. Most verbs are used to pose an argument. All technical and scientific information is intended to address some gap – some area or issue that is underexplored or unknown. Managers are never going to ask employees to conduct research/write a report on something they already know the answer to. Therefore, when we talk about **argue** verbs, we're not looking to be combative with readers; rather we want to present clear, logical claims that can support or contradict existing ideas. Argue verbs vary in degree and types (e.g., *argue*, *complain*, and *insist* as well as *posit*, *add*, *reply*, and *say*. Transition to **Slide 4**, which lists the three other verb classifications: **show**, **find**, and **think**.	Again, students might not have known the term *reporting verb* when you began the lesson, but the first activity and this slide should clarify it for students. Spend some time on illustrating how verbs suggest a writer's confidence level. Discuss the *imply/show* example (in the second sentence), but, if you have time, ask students to suggest alternative verbs for *noted* (in the first example) that project more or less confidence than the original. These types of activities reinforce previous lessons and remind students that their language choices signal something to their readers. **Argue** verbs are the most frequent verb type in technical and scientific writing, so that's why it gets its own slide. Students are likely familiar with **show** and **find** verbs, but they might be surprised at the number of **think** verbs as well as how often they are used in technical and scientific writing (you might remind students about the frequency of verbs like *believe* in the profession writing data set). If time allows, have students explore concordances of 'believe* that' or 'feel* that.' If you use the Concordance Plot feature in AntConc, you'll see that these types of verbs cluster at the end of the document, suggesting that the writers are expressing a belief or

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Transition to **Slide 5**. Emphasize that while there is a variety of verbs choices, past research has found that seven make up over 25% of the verbs identified in published writing across multiple disciplines: *suggest, argue, find, show, describe, propose,* and *report*. Most are **argue** verbs but the list also includes some **show** and **find** verbs. **Think** verbs aren't as frequent as the other three types but that doesn't mean those verbs are not found in published writing. In fact, the data set shows **think** verbs are in most published writing, but with much less frequency than the other verbs types.	understanding of the previously discussed information. The information on Slide 5 illustrates that verb choice can also depend on the type of research being conducted. For example, verbs like *suggest* and *argue* associate more with research in the humanities and social sciences. Conversely, verbs like *show*, *propose*, and *report* associate more with research in the sciences and engineering.

Transition

"While you use reporting verbs to argue, show, find, and think, it is also important to communicate what you did not find. This offers readers a more comprehensive understanding of your position, and, as a result, makes you appear to be a more credible writer. Our next activity allows you to explore how reporting verbs can also clarify or differentiate information."

Engagement (5 min.) Read students the instructions for the Data Digging activity. Students should already have the Professional Writing data set loaded in AntConc (since it was the last data set they examined in the first activity).	As students work, walk around to the computers to help them stay on task and to troubleshoot technology issues. The recommended sorting for this activity is particularly important (2L/1L/0). Remember that in AntConc, you first generate the concordances with the **Start** function and then resort with the **Sort** function. Users who skip the first step and just use the Sort feature will get jumbled results.
Evaluation (4 min.) • What is the function of this pattern for reporting research or what someone said?	**Watch the YouTube tutorial on how to do this activity in AntConc:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVtB48NvrU4 Below are the **key takeaways** to this activity: The functions that emerge suggest that reporting verbs can be used to clarify, restrict, or preempt: • Lines 40–52 are great demonstrations of what the writer is *not* doing. Note this string of examples are written in first person, making the writer appear more emphatic about their

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	purpose (e.g., I am *not* *arguing* that…). Students may also notice that the majority of these examples come from philosophy, which may point toward a language pattern synonymous with the humanities rather than the social or hard sciences. • Lines 14, 19, 22 and 60–63 are great examples of instructing readers not to overgeneralize or jump to conclusions. • Lines 142–150 perform similar functions as above, clarifying a point or making a more differentiated point. These functions add further nuance to a piece of writing.

Summary Statement(s)

Be aware of the verbs you use to report technical information. Verbs project your confidence in the information being reported as well as help readers understand how you argue, show, find, and think about information.

You have many verb choices to select from, but 25% of the verbs you use are common to most disciplines – choose verbs with a focus on what you want readers to know rather than to simply provide language variety.

Expansion (4 min.)	The homework assignments do not require students to engage with AntConc or the corpora. However, students must apply some of the data-driven principles they learned during this unit.
Refer students to the two homework assignments.	
	The first homework assignment measures if students can identify transitions within a paragraph.
The first assignment asks them to identify reporting verbs in two abstracts	
The second assignment asks them to choose reporting verbs based on their understanding of a context.	The second homework assignment measures if students understand what types of transitions to use (depending on the function of the sentence).
Refer students to the Fact Sheet for this task. When reviewing the fact sheet, point out that the presentation didn't review the panel on how students and professionals use reporting verbs, but there are some verbs that students overuse and under compared to professional writers.	The Fact Sheet on this unit should provide students with all the information they need to complete the homework. This document also contains all the slides included in the Presentation activities.