

# Tense use in academic writing... for writing about research

*This is a summary of some of the more common uses of tense in academic writing, in particular in writing up research. Are these used in your discipline – all the time? some of the time? never?*

Introductions & Literature Reviews		
Purpose	Tense	Example
To report facts / truths	Present	Demand for power at different charging locations <u>varies</u> over time (Matthew et al., 2017; Xiang et al., 2019).  Social attraction <u>is</u> a type of sensory-based conservation, and <u>is</u> a common management tool used worldwide for the establishment of seabird breeding colonies (Arnold et al., 2011; Jones & Kress, 2012).
To report historical facts	Past	Drive tourism <u>was</u> also instrumental in the early historical popularity of cars, and of combustion cars in particular (Bladh, 2019; Ivory & Genus, 2010; Sovacool, 2009).  Between 2008 and 2020, only 3,600 hectares of native forest <u>were</u> afforested and included in the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (Chartres et al., 2020).
To make general statements about previous research, or summarise previous research by several researchers	Present perfect	Several international studies <u>have focused</u> on ...  Social attractants <u>have primarily been used</u> in the establishment or re-establishment of permanent colonies.  Past trials of social attractants in black-fronted terns <u>have demonstrated</u> positive yet inconclusive results due to inadequate observations or equipment (Anderson et al., 2007; Steffens, 2008).
To report results of one specific study	Past	Bergin & Kimberley (2014) <u>found</u> that regeneration of totara ( <i>Podocarpus totara</i> ) in the presence of grazing was more prevalent on steeper slopes ...  Decoys and audio playback <u>were used</u> to attract ... .The attractants <u>facilitated</u> the establishment of a colony of thirty-two least terns ...
To introduce a new area or researcher (before going on to report/discuss a specific study)  (* less common in sciences)	Present perfect	Caruthers and Wilson (2017) <u>have demonstrated</u> that deep understanding of new information is determined by ... . They surveyed ...
To report an original author's opinion  (* This is an alternative way of reporting, and less common in sciences)	Present	Halldén's (1991) research <u>claims</u> that working class parents are more likely to ...  Lareau (2011) <u>argues</u> that the middle classes place great importance on ...  Bladh (2019) <u>draws</u> a distinction between ...
To state the purpose of your paper	Present or past	The study <u>aimed / aims</u> to determine ...  The study reported here <u>was</u> conducted to investigate..  This study <u>investigates</u> ... Secondly, we <u>consider</u> ...

Materials & Methods		
Purpose	Tense	Example
For general population	Present	All students <u>sit</u> an examination before entering the course.
For sample	Past	The participants <u>were</u> students enrolled in ...
For conventional material familiar to reader	Present	IELTS <u>tests</u> receptive and productive levels of English.
For specifically designed materials	Past	The XXX model in this study <u>was</u> designed to test ...
For method	Past  Past perfect	Surveys <u>were</u> distributed to ...  Eight hundred and twenty five specimens <u>were</u> collected over three sampling periods.  Follow-up interviews were carried out with ten of the respondents who <u>had completed</u> a survey form in Stage 1 of the research.
Results		
For specific findings	Past	Three of the six variables <u>were identified</u> as significant predictors in ...  The percentage of total interactions during the first observation session ... <u>ranged</u> from 0% in the Hopkins, Potts, Upper and Lower Waimakariri, to 86% in ...
Discussion		
To refer back to hypothesis or purpose	Past	The aim <u>was</u> to compare ...
To restate findings, explain findings	Past	Natural regeneration of woody vegetation <u>was</u> unevenly distributed ...  The sample size <u>was</u> very small.  It <u>was</u> possible that ...
To discuss previous research	Past, or Present perfect	<i>(You will have to refer to previous literature in the discussion; see p.1 on introductions and literature reviews for examples of tense use.)</i>
To compare your findings with others' findings	Present	This finding <u>is</u> consistent with other published literature.  These observations <u>contrast</u> with the more generally accepted view of ...  The 72.5% emergence <u>is</u> higher than the range reported by ...
To introduce implications	Present	It <u>appears</u> that ...  The findings <u>indicate</u> that ...

**Some examples above have been adapted from:**

- Apse, M. (2019). *Parents' discursive accounts of their children's participation in rugby league* [Masters Thesis, Lincoln University]. Research@Lincoln. <https://hdl.handle.net/10182/10812>
- Fitt, H. (2022). Boring and inadequate? A literature review considering the use of electric vehicles in drive tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25 (12), 1920-1946. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1937074>
- Hamblin, C. (2017). *Colony dynamics and social attraction in black-fronted terns, Chlidonias albastratus* [Masters Thesis, Lincoln University]. Research@Lincoln. <https://hdl.handle.net/10182/8796>
- Pedley, D. (2022). *Natural regeneration of woody vegetation in pastoral hill country: A case study of Oashore Station, Banks Peninsula* [Masters Thesis, Lincoln University]. Research@Lincoln. <https://hdl.handle.net/10182/15025>

If you would like to know more about using different tenses, ask about the workshops and individual appointments we offer.