

Verbs to Replace Sacrosanct "Said"

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"Said" is the all-purpose verb most journalists and public relations writers use when identifying something a person stated, whether quoted or not. This is especially true in daily newspapers where "said" is eminently preferred because the attributed quote or action took place in the past – i.e., before the story was published.

- John said, "I like the Travel Channel because its programs are fun."
- John said Travel Channel programs are fun.

Nonetheless, many PR folks often use "says" in place of "said." They are not alone, but they should know when "says" makes sense and when it doesn't. "Says" works well when someone is known for saying the same thing again and again: e.g., 1) American legend Louis Armstrong says, "If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know"; 2) In his nightclub act, deadpan comedian Henny Youngman often says, "Take my wife...Please"; and 3) Baseball legend Yogi Berra says, "I didn't really say everything I said."

Of course, other verbs can be used in place of "said"; for example, in written pieces that include several references to what one or more people have asserted but the meaning of which might be misunderstood or less nuanced if "said" were used in every instance.

In general, you can't go wrong with "said" in most of what is written in journalism and public relations, especially when there are only one or two references. But too many "sais" or too many of any one verb can make a piece, particularly a long one, sound stiff.

If you use replacements, take heed of the logic, often subtle, that each conveys, and avoid replacements that are stilted or downright affected; e.g., "opined" or "posited."

Here are a few conventional replacements for "said" that won't tilt the stilt if used smartly:

| | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| acknowledged | declared | maintained | reminisced |
| added | delivered | mentioned | replied |
| affirmed | disclosed | noted | reported |
| alleged | divulged | pleaded | responded |
| announced | echoed | pronounced | revealed |
| answered | estimated | recalled | stated |
| argued | explained | recollected | suggested |
| asserted | expressed | refuted | voiced |
| cited | guessed | related | |
| claimed | imagined | remarked | |
| conveyed | implied | remembered | |

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Verbs to Suggest Depth of Involvement

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In written pieces that explain how people pursue their vocations, the writer often chooses verbs that reflect a more accurate, nuanced sense of the pursuit's depth. For example, instead of writing, "In the show, Mary approaches her role like an actress with experience well beyond her years," the writer might say she "immerses" herself in or "consumes" herself with her role, but each replacement verb has a different meaning. Whereas both verbs mean deep pursuit, "immerses" suggests a modestly intense involvement while "consumes" suggests an addictive or excessive engagement. Here are verbs that imply or explain different degrees of involvement. You can use present or past tense; e.g., she absorbs herself in or she is absorbed by.

| | | | |
|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| absorbs | consumes | imbues | occupies |
| buries | engulfs | immerses | plunges |
| busies | engages | invests | preoccupies |
| concerns | engrosses | involves | steeps |

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