Factive vs. non-factive verbs

When writing an academic text, especially when reporting the ideas of others, it is vital that you select the correct verb to describe what you have understood about the message in the original text. One consideration you should make when selecting verbs is to be aware of the underlying factivity of the verb you want to use. Verbs can be divided into two categories factive and non-factive. When you use a factive verb you are committed to the truth of the proposition expressed in the *that*-clause which follows.

Example: Researchers **have shown that** passive smoking is more harmful than was thought in the past.

With non-factive verbs the speaker/writer is not committed to the truth of the proposition expressed in the *that*-clause. Non-factive predicates indicate that the speaker/writer does not grant factual status to the proposition in the *that*-clause, not that s/he considers the proposition to be false.

Example: The study **claims that** passive smoking is more harmful than was thought in the past.

By considering the verbs in the boxes below it should become clear of how important verb selection in reporting others' ideas is.

Factive verbs commonly used in essay writing

accept	discover	know	recognize	admit
explain	reveal	establish	note	acknowledge
learn	allow	observe	see	remember
find out	prove	show	concede	find (=discover)
confirm	forget	realize	grasp	understand
recall	demonstrate			

Non-factive verbs commonly used in essay writing

affirm	emphasize	maintain	stress	argue	suspect
presume	estimate	object	suggest	assert	expect
predict	suppose	assume	feel	believe	foresee
propose	think	claim	reply	consider	imply
specify	write	state	insist	conclude	recommend
underline	doubt	indicate	imagine	hypothesize	declare say