Tenses in Academic Writing

There are 3 common tenses used in academic writing:

- **Present Simple Tense**
- **Past Simple Tense**
- **Present Perfect Tense**
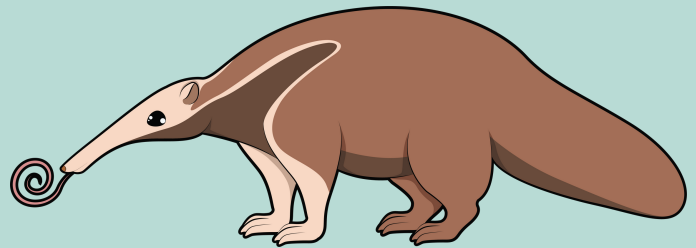
Let's take a closer look at each of these tenses to understand when we should use them!

Present Simple Tense

Present simple tense is considered the "default" tense in academic writing, meaning we will always write in present simple tense unless we have a specific reason or circumstance requiring a different tense for accuracy and clarity.

**Some specific functions for present simple tense are:**

- Framing a topic/paper (describing what has already been said about a certain topic and contextualizing the scholarly conversation)
- Making general statements of analysis, argumentation, or interpretation of research
- Asserting claims in your own paper
- Referencing claims from others' research and papers
- Describing events in a literary work (this is called narrative present)
- Referring to tables, figures, and other multimedia in papers

Past Simple Tense

Past simple tense is used to refer to events or actions that took place at a specific point in the past. Past simple tense may be used more often in STEM writing, where methods and data are described.

Some specific functions for present simple tense are:
- Describing the methods and/or data from a completed experiment or study (usually in STEM papers)
- Discussing specific findings of a previous study
- Clarifying past-time events with specific markers
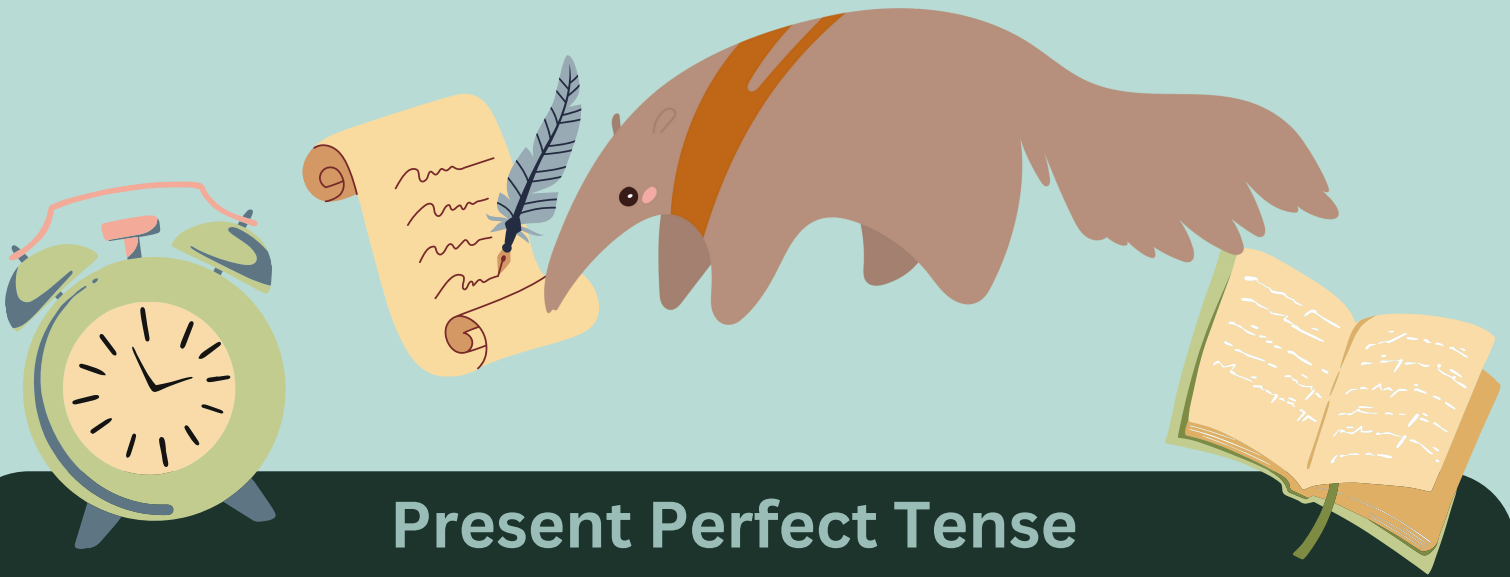
Present Perfect Tense

Present perfect tense is used as a bridge between a past event and the present moment (because it is a present tense, its use indicates that the past event/finding is still relevant to current events/findings). Present perfect emphasizes what *has been done* rather than specific claims or findings.

Some specific functions for present simple tense are:
- Introducing a general area of research or a new topic relevant to the paper
- Introducing different perspectives or ideas on a topic, or contradictory findings to show the different views on a scholarly conversation
- Summarizing previous research without specific authors
- Identifying gaps in existing research