Tense Choice

Present tense

1. **Established knowledge**: "Finland **has** the world's highest rate of X infection."

2. **Others' general findings**: "Aho **found** that no evidence for X **exists**."

   This verb can be in the present tense as well, if it sounds logical ("found" → "finds,") but usually for a living author: "Aho **suggests / states** that X **is** Y."

3. **Your own goal** in the introduction or abstract: "This study **attempts / will attempt / attempted** to discover whether X **falls** when Y **rises**."

4. **Yours or anyone's theorizing**: "We **hypothesize** that X **is**—" "Results **may** depend on population size." "It **seems** that mice very seldom **die** from over-eating."

5. **Contents of tables or figures**: "Table 2 **includes** further details."

Past tense

1. **Specific details in** yours or others' **published work (be alert to mention of quantities)**

   "We / Aho **found** that the two years with the highest rates **were** 2002 and 2004."
   "Only six of the mice **survived** (Aho 1999)." (**past** tense) **But generalize to:**
   "showing that, under these conditions, very few **survive**." (**present** tense)

2. **Others' general findings if logic demands**, often in a list of findings: "At this temperature, most mice **died** (8), but after immediate air-cooling, those that **died** were few (9), and when immersed briefly in cold water, all **survived** (10)." (Note **end-focus x 3!**)

3. **All of your own current work**: "Subjects **stated** their ages." "X **formed** a Y."
   "None of them **arrived**," except for things truly permanent: "The city **is** in Savo; its trees **were** mainly birches." (Cities do not move, but trees die.)

4. **What others have said:** Aho (1999) **predicted** that this test will become the **gold standard.**
   Present tense "**predicts**" is also acceptable here; see under present tense, #2.

   When I see present tense for your own methods or results, I assume that you cannot be discussing your own work. I thus seek a citation, but no citation, of course, appears.

Perfect forms are fine for data most similar to yours in topic or findings: "We found that mice **died** at -20 degrees, and in Smith's work (2006), mice **have died** at a similar temperature."

The present perfect tense is useful: "X **has** never **survived** where Y **is** a common virus (6)."
The perfect brings events **up to the present**, "No one **has shown** [and still haven't] X to be true."

If I cannot decide between past and present tense, I choose **non-temporal forms (ones indicating no time)—such as participles and infinitives** (see page 22 in Titles for examples).