

USING APPROPRIATE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE: THE NEED FOR HEDGING

SEED ONLINE STUDY SKILLS SESSIONS



WHAT IS HEDGING?

- Hedging refers to the use of cautious language when you make claims, give opinions and interpret the literature
- Interpretation is the key to being critical, and hedging is the key to having your interpretations taken seriously
- If you make strong assertions, and/or make opinions sound like facts, then your writing will sound immature and it will not be taken seriously at all
- A lack of hedging is one of the main weaknesses with students' writing

SOME EXAMPLES

Probably the best lager in the world (Carlsberg)

The world's favourite airline (British Airways)

Which of the two slogans do you trust more? Why?

EXAMPLES FROM ACADEMIA

This proves that Chomsky's theory is correct

Without doubt, this study is the most up to date

Therefore, the results demonstrate that Smith is right

Versus.....

This suggests that Chomsky's theory is correct

Arguably, this study is the most up to date

Therefore, the results demonstrate that Smith is perhaps right



USEFUL WORDS & PHRASES

Modal verbs are useful for hedging -

This could mean // This might suggest // This can sometimes occur

- as are the expressions below

This suggests that // Arguably,.... // The results of this study.... // The implication is....

But no need to hedge facts!

The sun arguably rises in the East



EXERCISE

**Can you adjust the language in the text below to make it sound more
'academic'?**

Everyone knows that learning a second language in adulthood is harder than learning our first language. It has been proven that we all acquire our first language in a very predictable way, whether we speak English, Greek or Tamil. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that a baby born today will be speaking his/her first language proficiently in just a few years time.

AVOID EMPTY EXPRESSIONS

Everyone knows/believes that.....

Really? How do you know?

It has been proven/suggested.....

By whom?

There is much research/literature/information.....

OK, then show some examples!



AVOID INTUITIVE STATEMENTS

Avoid making statements that 'sound' true, but cannot in fact be proven at all:

It is harder to learn a second language as an adult than to learn our first language as infants

The Beckhams could not be considered upper-class because upper-class children are not called Romeo or Brooklyn

Climate change is affecting the entire world

Women superheroes, such as Wonder Woman, are always portrayed in a sexualised manner

Can you add one more example, based on your own programme of study?



PHRASAL VERBS

- Phrasal verbs are not directly related to hedging, but they do create a more informal tone in your writing – it's best to avoid using them too much
- A phrasal verb consists of **a verb + a preposition**
- For example, *stand up*, *go in*, *sit down*, *come out*, *find out*, *blend in*, *go off*....
- Try to replace phrasal verbs with their more formal, one-word counterpart
 - We carried out the experiment/we conducted the experiment
 - We found out the way forward/we discovered the way forward
 - I looked into the history of the subject/I investigated the history of the subject

FINAL THOUGHTS.....

- Do not make opinions sound like facts, ever
- Get in the habit of always using a hedging device every time you present an opinion or an interpretation of someone else's work
- Look at the hedging devices used by authors whose work you read, be it books, journals or websites – emulate this style
- The more cautious your writing, the more you will be taken seriously as a writer

FINAL EXERCISE

Have a look at the text below – what changes would you suggest making?

There has been much discussion regarding the subject of the IELTS examination. It is impossible to duplicate actual real-world conversation during test conditions, for example, but this is how the IELTS speaking test plays out. Likewise, the writing test is supposed to reflect academic writing, but it does not involve searching for references, much time for planning and may not reflect the student's academic subject. Thus, the IELTS examination is a failure.

FINAL CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist for each and every essay you write from this point on, because academic writing is largely a tick-box exercise – it's very predictable



FINAL CHECKLIST

Introduction paragraph

Hook?
Background?
Essay plan?
Thesis statement?

Body paragraphs

Topic sentence?
Only one topic?
Does each topic relate back to the thesis?

Formatting

Single space OR space and a half?
12 size Times New Roman font?
Are quotations correctly formatted and especially the References page?

Conclusion

Main opinion?
Recap of main points?
Any new topics?
Closing thought?

Style

Sufficient hedging?
Sufficient illustration/criticality?
Use of phrasal verbs?
Standard English grammar?