# English Language Enhancement Workshops: Fundamentals in Academic Writing

## Seminar 1: The Character of Academic English
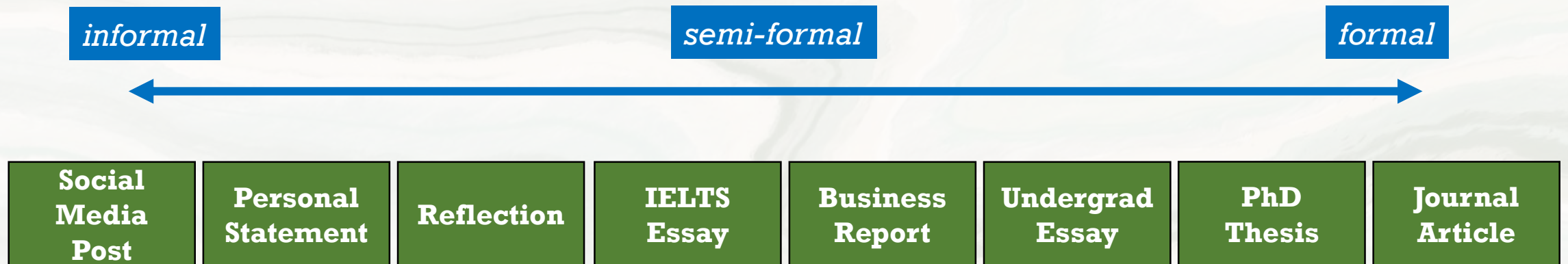
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# English Formality Spectrum

Where on the spectrum would you place these text types? Why?

**informal**            **semi-formal**            **formal**

<--------------------------------------------------->

| Social Media Post | Personal Statement | Reflection | IELTS Essay | Business Report | Undergrad Essay | PhD Thesis | Journal Article |

# Identifying Academic Style

| IELTS Essay | Personal Statement | Undergrad Essay | Business Report | Social Media Post | PhD Thesis | Reflection | Journal Article |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Social media usage around the world has increased during this pandemic by about 20-80% (Naeem et al., 2020). | **Undergrad Essay** |
| 2 | From the arguments and examples given I firmly believe that overall communication and mans' sociability has been advanced enormously due to the huge technological progress of the past twenty years. | **IELTS Essay** |
| 3 | Fun fact: Hong Kong means "fragrant harbour" in Chinese. | **Social Media Post** |
| 4 | After receiving some poor feedback from my tutor about my academic style I re-read the course materials from Week 3 and consulted the uefap.com website. My next assignment achieved a higher grade. | **Reflection** |

# Identifying Academic Style

| IELTS Essay | Personal Statement | Undergrad Essay | Business Report | Social Media Post | PhD Thesis | Reflection | Journal Article |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **5** | A limitation of the small-scale corpus-based study presented in this chapter is acknowledged to be the small number of participants. | **PhD Thesis** |
| **6** | I've demonstrated that I won't get flustered when given responsibility in both of my internships. So I'm now looking for a global company to start my career. | **Personal Statement** |
| **8** | In view of the problem of the high operating costs in the Hong Kong startup ecosystem, three solutions will be provided in this proposal | **Business Report** |
| **9** | Thus far, there is a lack of clarity in the terminology and definition of reflection, its antecedent conditions, its processes, teaching strategies and outcomes (see Moon 2006; Procee 2006; Rogers 2001; Russell 2005). | **Journal Article** |

# Identifying Academic Sentences

1. Blackberries are great for your health.

2. Fruit and vegetable intake is known to promote good health.

3. English is widely spoken in Singapore, India, Malaysia, etc.

4. Researchers have been investigating the potential benefits of blackberries for many years.

5. The implementation of computer assisted learning has brought about a ton of improvements.

6. Computer-assisted learning has resulted in many positive impacts in education, most notably in learning analytics (Chan & Lee, 2021; Johns, 2022).

7. Researchers have got some provisional findings. But we need more research.

8. Blackberry consumption may contribute to the prevention of cardiovascular disease (Cook et al., 2017).

# Characteristics of Academic English

After looking at different styles of English, what do you think makes academic English different?

Scan the QR code to add one characteristic of academic English to the Padlet.

# Characteristics of Academic English

- is mostly formal

- uses references and citations for all its examples and evidence

- often uses long, complex and compound sentences

- tends to employ caution by using 'may…', 'it is possible that...', 'could…'

- may use specialised, field-based vocabulary

- avoids contractions such as won't, doesn't or it's

- avoids using conjunctions such as 'and' or 'but' at the beginning of sentences

- avoids personal pronouns

- maintains a neutral and emotionless tone

# Writing Academically

Note down some of the problems with this passage.

Share your ideas on the Padlet.

*Everybody knows about the threat of global warming to our planet. Why do we all pollute the atmosphere with gases and why do we throw rubbish that could be recycled? As far as I'm concerned, there are two aspects that can be improved. Firstly, I believe that everyone should use more public transport and leave their car at home. I also think we can all learn to recycle more of our plastic and glass bottles. Even left-over food can be used as compost.*

# Academic Writing Style Analysis

Scan the QR Code.

Read through the extract of an article by a Lingnan University researcher and note down whether any of the features below are found.

*Personal pronouns*

*Contractions*

*Formal negatives*

*"etc.", "and so on"…*

*Mid-position adverbs*

*Indirect questions*

*'Hedging' language*

*Split infinitives*

*'Wordy' sentences*

*Passive voice*

# Academic Writing Style Analysis

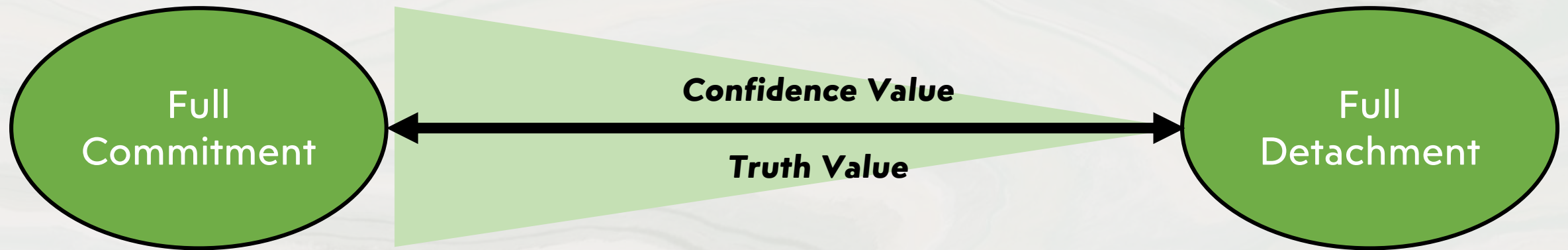| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Personal pronouns** | Is it found? ✓ | Is it Typical? ✗ |
| **Contractions** | Is it found? ✗ | Is it Typical? ✓ |
| **Formal negatives** | Is it found? ✓ | Is it Typical? ✓ |
| **"etc.", "and so on"…** | Is it found? ✗ | Is it Typical? ✓ |
| **Indirect questions** | Is it found? ✗ | Is it Typical? ✗ |
| **Mid-position adverbs** | Is it found? ✓ | Is it Typical? ✗ |
| **Split infinitives** | Is it found? ✓ | Is it Typical? ✓ |
| **'Wordy' sentences** | Is it found? ✗ | Is it Typical? ✓ |
| **Passive voice** | Is it found? ✓ | Is it Typical? ✓ |
| **'Hedging' language** | Is it found? ✓ | Is it Typical? ✓ |

# Non-Native Writers

While native writers showed a more *"balanced presentation"* of their commitment or detachment to claims, non-native speakers displayed a more *"authoritative stance"* (Hyland and Milton, 1997).

Bulgarian writers seemed to present a *"highly authoritative style,"* using a wider array of boosters and fewer hedges, whereas native English writers constructed *"a more tentative discourse"* (Vassileva, 2001).

Native English writers *"avoided… authoritative claims"* in their work and used very few boosters (Koutsantoni, 2005).

# Commitment & Detachment
## *(Akbas, 2014)*

Full Commitment

Confidence Value

Truth Value

Full Detachment

*It is clear that* the bird flu *will* spread *when* the infected birds shed the virus in their nasal secretions.

The bird flu *might* spread *if* the infected birds are shedding the virus in their nasal secretions.

# Hedges & Boosters

**Original**

*Scientists and industrialists disagree about the health hazards of dioxins, the latter stating that the risks are exaggerated.*

**Hedged**

*Scientists and industrialists disagree about the health hazards of dioxins, the latter stating that the risks **may** be exaggerated.*

**Boosted**

*Scientists and industrialists disagree about the health hazards of dioxins, the latter stating that the risks are **clearly** exaggerated.*

*Source: Swales & Feak (2012)*

# Hedges Scale

**Stronger**

A. There is a definite possibility that…

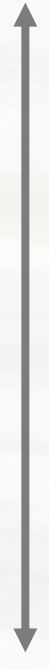B. There is a strong possibility that…

C. There is a good possibility that…

D. There is a slight possibility that…

E. There is little possibility that…

**Weaker**

*Source: Swales & Feak (2012)*

# Boosters Scale

**Stronger**

A. It is clear that…

B. It is rather clear that…

C. It is very probable/highly likely that…

D. It is probable/likely that…

E. It is unlikely that…

**Weaker**

*Source: Swales & Feak (2012)*

# Hedging Verbs

**Original**

Word-of-mouth advertising influences a consumer's incentive to purchase a product.

**Hedged**

Word-of-mouth advertising **can** influence a consumer's incentive to purchase a product.

Word-of-mouth advertising **could** influence a consumer's incentive to purchase a product.

Word-of-mouth advertising **may** influence a consumer's incentive to purchase a product.

Word-of-mouth advertising **might** influence a consumer's incentive to purchase a product.

*Source: Swales & Feak (2012)*

# Hedging Language

**Original**

Children living in poverty do poorly in school.

**Hedging with Verbs**

Children living in poverty **appear to** do poorly in school.

Children living in poverty **seem to** do poorly in school.

Children living in poverty **tend to** do poorly in school.

**Hedging with Quantifiers**

**Many** children living in poverty do poorly in school.

**A majority of** children living in poverty do poorly in school.

**Some** children living in poverty do poorly in school.

**In most parts of the world** children living in poverty do poorly in school.

# Hedging Verbs

**Look at the following sentences and decide which verb *hedges* the sentence to make it weaker.**

1. The results (**indicate** / establish) that there is a link between smoking and lung cancer.

2. The survey results (**suggest** / show) that the reuse of sentences or sections from one's previously published papers is a questionable practice.

3. The results given in Figure 4 (validate / **support**) the second conclusion that certain bacteria can reduce arsenic levels in groundwater.

4. Baseline conditions have been (assumed / **shown**) to be accurate at the time of the surveys.

*Source: Swales & Feak (2012)*

# Hedges & Boosters

Download and read the two texts by scanning the QR code.

Underline the words the students use to weaken or hedge their statements.

Circle any words the students use to boost or strengthen their claims.

# Hedging Language

Now, try to write five of your own academic-style sentences that could be seen in a thesis or research article. Share your sentences on the Padlet.

Each sentence should include at least *one hedge*.