

From Strong Claims to Neutral Language

Activity Type

Reading, Vocabulary and Writing Exercises: identifying, table completion, matching, gap-fill, writing and rewriting sentences

Focus

Academic style and tone

Aim

To practice identifying overly strong academic claims and rewriting them in a more neutral, evidence-based style.

Preparation

Make one copy of the two-page worksheet for each student.

Level

Upper-intermediate (B2)

Time

45 minutes

Introduction

In this academic style and tone worksheet, students identify exaggerated, emotional and promotional language in short academic-style statements and rewrite the claims in a more neutral, cautious way.

Procedure

Give each student a copy of the two-page worksheet.

First, students read a short introduction to academic style and tone.

Students then underline two words or phrases in each sentence that make the language sound too strong or not neutral.

Exercise A - Answer key

1. remarkable, proves
2. Everyone benefits, the perfect solution
3. guarantees success, the best available approach
4. a terrible impact, the worst possible outcomes

Next, students complete a table with two examples of each language type using the words and phrases they underlined.

Exercise B - Suggested answers

Language type	Examples
Strong verb or verb phrase	1. proves 2. guarantees success
Emotional language	1. remarkable 2. a terrible impact
Exaggerated language	1. Everyone benefits 2. the worst possible outcomes
Promotional language	1. the best available approach 2. the perfect solution

Accept other reasonable answers if students can justify them.

After that, students match each word or phrase to its most appropriate neutral alternative.

Exercise C - Answer key

1. f 2. d 3. g 4. a 5. c 6. e 7. b 8. h

(continued on the next page)

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Procedure continued

Students then complete each sentence with one neutral alternative from Exercise C. Tell students that more than one answer may be possible.

Exercise D - Answer key

1. a possible solution / a potential solution
2. may improve outcomes / could improve results
3. negative impact / harmful effect
4. an effective option / one possible approach
5. suggests / indicates

Following that, students rewrite the sentences in a more neutral academic style.

Remind the students that they are not limited to the fixed phrases from Exercises C and D. Encourage them to apply the neutral language strategies from the worksheet more broadly and use their own ideas.

Exercise E - Possible answers

1. The report suggests that later school start times may help address teenage sleep problems.
2. Community gardens could help address food access problems, and many neighbourhoods may benefit from them.
3. Peer mediation may be more effective than traditional discipline systems and may lead to positive outcomes in complex school conflicts.
4. The new online enrolment system led to difficulties for many first-year students.

Finally, students write a sentence on an academic topic using exaggerated language. Then, they swap worksheets with a partner and rewrite each other's sentences in a neutral style.

Encourage the students to use the examples of exaggerated language from the worksheet as a guide. If needed, write some example topics on the board for students, such as artificial intelligence, higher education costs, public transport, etc.

From Strong Claims to Neutral Language

Although academic writing should be clear, objective and based on evidence, writers sometimes use exaggerated, emotional or overly strong language that can make arguments sound less reliable. To improve your academic style and tone, use neutral and cautious language.

A. Underline two words or phrases in each sentence that make the language sound too strong or not neutral.

1. This remarkable study proves that bilingual education is an effective alternative to monolingual education.
2. Everyone benefits from using digital payment systems, and they are the perfect solution for developing economies.
3. For some training providers, intensive weekend workshops are described as the best available approach and one that guarantees success.
4. The policy had a terrible impact on communities and created the worst possible outcomes for residents.

B. Complete the table with two examples of each language type, using the words and phrases you underlined in Exercise A. Some answers may fit more than one category.

Language type	Definition	Examples
Strong verb or verb phrase	A verb or phrase that expresses too much certainty	1. 2.
Emotional language	A word or phrase that expresses strong feelings or strong judgment	1. 2.
Exaggerated language	A word or phrase that makes something seem absolute, extreme or universal	1. 2.
Promotional language	A word or phrase that presents something as especially good	1. 2.

C. Match each word or phrase to its most appropriate neutral alternative.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. remarkable | a. may improve outcomes / could improve results |
| 2. proves | b. poor outcomes / unfavourable results |
| 3. perfect solution | c. many people could benefit / countries may benefit |
| 4. guarantees success | d. suggests / indicates |
| 5. everyone benefits | e. negative impact / harmful effect |
| 6. terrible impact | f. significant / notable |
| 7. worst possible outcomes | g. a possible solution / a potential solution |
| 8. best available approach | h. an effective option / one possible approach |

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D. Complete each sentence with one neutral word or phrase from Exercise C.

1. For smaller towns, extending evening bus services may be for late-night transport problems.
2. Some researchers argue that short weekly quizzes in large first-year courses.
3. The closure of local clinics has had a on access to healthcare in rural areas.
4. In schools with limited lab space, virtual simulations may be for science teaching.
5. The report that regular reading at home is linked to better vocabulary growth.

E. Rewrite each sentence in a neutral academic style.

1. The report proves that later school start times solve teenage sleep problems.
.....
.....
2. Community gardens will solve food access problems, and every neighbourhood will benefit from them.
.....
.....
3. Peer mediation is far better than traditional discipline systems and delivers outstanding results in difficult school conflicts.
.....
.....
4. The new online enrolment system caused disastrous problems for almost all first-year students.
.....
.....

F. Write one sentence about an academic topic using exaggerated language. Then, swap worksheets with a partner and rewrite each other's sentence in a neutral style.

Exaggerated:

.....

Neutral:

.....