

Hedging – Use of Cautious Language

Grammar – Hedging

Academic English is characterised by its use of cautious language, not being overly confident or direct in making statements. This helps to avoid being “wrong”, as you never stated 100% that you are right. This is a difficult skill to master in writing and speaking, especially for Academic English. These exercises help make you aware of hedging, and how you can do it better.

Task 1: How can you change the following statements to make them more cautious and therefore easier to support? (and more suitable for academic work)

1. The England football team must get rid of their manager.
2. Gordon Brown was better than Tony Blair.
3. Americans are friendlier than British people.
4. Picasso was more talented than Matisse.
5. The greatest scientist ever was Newton.
6. Spain has the best football team in the world.
7. The team failed because they are untalented, spoilt and over-paid.
8. The key to his success was his upbringing.

Task 2: Read the text. What do the underlined words and phrases have in common? Why does the writer use them?

The latest research appears to confirm that buildings are responsible for approximately 40% of energy consumption and 35% of EU carbon emissions. It has been suggested that companies should take a lead in adopting policies to reduce these emissions. Such policies might include retrofitting and energy reduction. As a rule, most factories and offices can make these kinds of changes with it affecting their efficiency.

Some hedging techniques.

See which ones you used in Task 1.

1. Use of hedging verbs such as *appear* or *tend to*
Example: Most British people do **not appear to be** aware of the conflicts over water.
2. The use of hedging adverbs such as *arguably* and *fairly*
Example: Sustainability is **arguably** one of the most misused words in the English language.
3. Using 'that' clauses to hedge
Example: **It is widely accepted** that the Athenians of Ancient Greece formed the world's first democracy
4. The use of the language of probability
Example: New strategies for resolving water conflicts **may** be required if the issue is to be dealt with effectively.
5. The use of hedging expressions
Example: **In many respects**, football should be regarded more as a business than a sport.

Hedging verbs

Look at the two sentences below. Which needs a hedging verb and why?

- *There is a connection between vegetarianism and lower rates of heart disease.*
- *David Cameron is visiting Australia next month.*

Some hedging verbs (ensure you know the correct grammar usage)

- appear(s) to / seem(s) to/ tend(s) to – *there appears to be*
- suggests/indicates – *Figures indicate that...*

- contribute to/ help to – *Most commentators agree that deregulation contributed to the banking crisis of 2008.*

Task 3: Rewrite these sentences as hedged statements using the suggested verb and making any necessary grammatical changes.

1. The practice of short selling brought about the collapse of Lehman Brothers. (*contributed*)
.....
2. Drought is the major problem in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa. (*appears*)
.....
3. Male gorillas are more aggressive than female gorillas, according to research. (*tend*)
.....
4. Smaller electronic companies are doing better than their larger rivals. (*seem*)
.....
5. A 2005 study said that the accuracy of Wikipedia was similar to that of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. (*suggested*)
.....

Hedging Adverbs

The use of the adverbs below will reduce the extremity, or certainty, of your argument. For each of the adverbs below, write a short definition

1. approximately
2. arguably
3. reasonably
4. relatively
5. reportedly
6. supposedly
7. typically
8. apparently
9. not necessarily
10. slightly
11. fairly, quite, rather
12. sometimes, usually, often, normally
13. to some extent / in some cases



Task 4: Choose one of the adverbs above and add it to the sentences below to modify their meaning. You will need to think about their position, as well as meaning.

Example:

The US economy grew faster in the first quarter than was expected.

The US economy grew **slightly** faster in the first quarter than was expected.

Apparently, the US economy grew faster in the first quarter than was expected.

1. Mature students manage their deadlines better than younger students.
2. The transition from prison life to ordinary life is a difficult one.
3. January is the wettest month in the UK.
4. Smaller shops suffer a decline in trade when a supermarket opens nearby.
5. Third-year undergraduate courses cover less ground, but in greater depth than in the first two years.
6. Although it works faster than other treatments, the new drug is expensive to produce.

Using *that* clauses

Using an impersonal *that* clause distances you from the argument or point of view. Using *It* (sometimes called the 'empty' or preparatory subject) allows you to avoid phrases such as 'I would argue that'. Here are some examples. Look at the verbs and suggest alternatives (which would change the meaning, but keep the same grammar).

It is widely argued that...

It has been suggested that...

It is commonly believed that...

It is generally accepted that...

It is possible to argue that...

Example: **It has been argued that** the reunification of the two Koreas would eventually be of benefit to both.

You can use a *that* clause to refer to studies and to refer to general opinion, as in the examples below.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>The latest research appears to show that...</p> <p>Studies have indicated that...</p> <p>The evidence suggests that...</p> <p>Statistics demonstrate that...</p> <p>A 2015 study indicates that...</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Studies have indicated that good mental health is facilitated by physical exercise.</p> | <p>Many taxpayers feel that...</p> <p>Most economists argue that...</p> <p>Nutritionists believe that...</p> <p>Most people agree that...</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Most people agree that there are certain freedoms all democracies must possess.</p> |
|---|---|

Task 5. Think about your essay and what you have read. Make 5 sentences beginning with a *that* clause. **For example:** Most people would agree that there is no one solution to resolving water conflicts.

1.....

2.....

3.....



4.....

5.....