Academic Style: The Language of Stance-Taking
Courtesy of Michelle Cox, Cornell University

Stance-taking refers to indications of a writer’s attitude toward a certain idea or position on an argument. When a writer does not indicate stance, the writing can come across as being writer-less. When a writer handles stance-taking language ineffectively, the writer can come across as being either too hesitant or too assertive in their claims. This handout provides guidance in using language in writing to effectively establish one’s stance.

Hedges1: a softening of a statement

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

Boosters: a strengthening of a comment

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

Attitude markers: indications of the author’s attitude toward a proposition or idea by indicating surprise, disbelief, understanding, or “interestingness”

- It is surprising that a relatively small amount of doping (say 10% F doping for O) does not preserve the magnetic ordering.
- With such vague and circular notions, it is hard to accept the author’s later conclusions.
- It is interesting to note that, at least to my knowledge, no such comprehensive book has ever been published.

Engagement markers: attempts to establish a connection with the reader and bring them into the text, by using personal pronouns (e.g. we and you), questions, commands, or directly addressing the reader

- If you are an experienced dc motor engineer, you may enjoy reading Chapter 6.
- Readers may be pleasantly surprised to note that the case examples, provided throughout the text, begin within the very first chapter.

Self-mentions: places where authors insert themselves into the text

I think that/in my opinion the discussion about institutions, cluster policies and relations that bridge and connect clusters with external agents deserves more attention.

Evaluative adjectives:

- Positive: useful, important, interesting, detailed, up-to-date, insightful, significant
- Negative: inconsistent, restricted, misleading

1 The material on this page is taken from Swales & Feak, 2012, pp. 240-241.
Moderating or qualifying a claim:\(^2\):

**Stronger**

- Word-of-mouth advertising *influences* a consumer’s purchasing decisions.
- Word-of-mouth advertising *can influence* a consumer’s purchasing decisions.
- Word-of-mouth advertising *could influence* a consumer’s purchasing decisions.
- Word-of-mouth advertising *may influence* a consumer’s purchasing decisions.
- Word-of-mouth advertising *might influence* a consumer’s purchasing decisions.

**Weaker**

- It is clear that ...
- It is rather clear that ...
- It is very probably/highly likely that ...
- It is probable/likely that ...
- It is possible that ...
- It is unlikely that ...

**Stronger**

- There is a definite possibility that ...
- There is a strong possibility that ...
- There is a good possibility that ...
- There is a slight possibility that ...
- There is little possibility that ...

**Weaker**

**Distancing to indicate stance**

Health education *seems to* have a positive impact on a patient’s quality of life.

*It would appear that* health education has a positive impact on ...

*Based on the limited data available* ...

*According to this preliminary study* ...

*Based on previous studies* ...

**Softening Generalizations**

- Children living in poverty *appear to/seem to/tend to* do poorly in school.
- *A majority of* children living in poverty do poorly in school.
- *In many parts of the world*, children living in poverty do poorly in school.
- *With the exception of/apart from/except for* those enrolled in specialized programs, children living in poverty do poorly in school.

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\(^2\) The material on this page is taken from Swales & Feak, 2012, pp. 159-162.